

CHINESE LITERATURE

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CHINESE LITERATURE

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Published by the Foreign Languages Press
26 Kuo Hui Chieh, Peking, China

NEW REALITIES AND NEW TASKS

A report given at the Second Conference of Chinese Writers

by Mao Tun

Comrade delegates:

In the four years that have elapsed since the All-China Association of Literary Workers was formed at our last conference, our country has made tremendous progress in the fields of politics, economics, culture and education. The courageous and difficult struggle waged for three years to resist American aggression and aid Korea so as to preserve peace has shattered the savage, brutal invasion plans of American imperialism, and has created the essential conditions for peaceably solving the Korean question and other related problems. Having victoriously carried out such gigantic movements as land reform, suppression of counter-revolutionaries, *san fan* and *wu fan* (drives against improper and illegal practices in public and private enterprises—ed), our society, in all its aspects, has undergone extensive and fundamental change.

A new atmosphere of abounding vitality has spread to every corner of new China; a seething, booming tide of construction is sweeping the country.

The victory in the war against aggression; our political, economic, cultural and educational accomplishments and developments, our vast attainments in democratic social reform; the raising of the people's material and cultural levels—all these have enabled our country's literature to develop and achieve new successes on a new social basis. This demonstrates the superiority of our country's state system.

Our new society has given literature new form and content. It has changed the relationship between literature and the masses. It has brought forth new literature, full of vitality. In our literature, just as in our country's other fields of endeavor, remarkable changes have taken place.

These changes and developments are inseparable from the leadership of the Communist Party and the interest it has taken in literary activity. They are inseparable from Chairman Mao's splendid principles of literature and art. They are inseparable from the efforts of all the comrades on the literary front throughout the nation.

These changes and developments are apparent, first of all, in the content of our literary works, in their material and themes, in the new characters that have been created. We have basically eliminated the various reactionary and corrupt literary ideas which permeated our coun-

try's literature for a long time, including feudal and colonial literary ideology. Bourgeois individualism and liberalism and the concept of art for art's sake have already lost their standing in our literary creations. Enlightened by communist thought, the literature of new China is vibrant with life, filled with limitless faith and optimism regarding national construction and the liberation of mankind. The outlook of our literature, therefore, and the scope of the life it reflects are much wider than before. According to preliminary investigation, of the more than two thousand stories, articles, reports and dramas published in our leading newspapers and magazines in the past four years as well as the motion pictures released during that time, about four hundred deal with industrial production and the life of the workers, over four hundred are about the rural struggle and the life of the peasants, over three hundred take the War of Resistance against Japan, or the War of Liberation, or the War to Resist American Aggression and Aid Korea as their themes, more than three hundred describe life in the armed forces or the relationship between our military personnel and the people, approximately seventy deal with the life and struggles of our national minority peoples, and about two hundred describe various other aspects of social struggle and social democratic reform.

Although still incomplete, these figures make obvious how very different the new literature of China is from the old. From the rich and tumultuous life and struggles of our people, we writers have drawn upon a large assortment of new material and themes to create a considerable variety of new personalities, reflecting through them all the new aspects and prospects of our country. These materials and themes could seldom, if ever, be found in Chinese literature of the past

In the last few years several successful and rather good works have been written. The novel *Wall of Bronze*, for instance, describes how the peasants supported the front during the War of Liberation by closely co-operating with the People's Liberation Army and conquering difficulties with it together. It paints a glowing picture of the hard-working, sincere rural cadres who put the public good above any personal interests. The film *The Steeled Fighter* and the play *Matured in Battle* show the firm heroism of the PLA fighters during the War of Liberation, their tenacity, their complete loyalty to the cause of the revolution. Pa Chin's reports from Korea, Wei Wei's article *Those Most to Be Loved*, and many other excellent sketches, reports and short stories of the war in Korea, from many different angles reflect the high level of internationalism, patriotism and striking heroism our volunteer fighters have displayed. The novels *The Sun Shines over the Sangkan River* and *The Hurricane*, the opera *The White-haired Girl*, all Stalin Prize winners, trenchantly and vividly portray the stupendous land reform and the changes in rural class relationships; they reveal the splendid qualities of the new peasants. *Face to Face with New Reality*, a play, deals with the struggle between the forces of progress and conservatism in the course of making industry

efficient. These works all have definite artistic merit. They have been of wide-spread educational value among the masses

Also worth pointing out is that for the first time in our country's history we have produced literature about our national minority peoples in which the advanced persons among them are featured as the leading characters. The solidarity and harmony among our national minorities, their happy new life, are being depicted more and more in our literature. Quite a number of fine works of this sort have come out. Top notch young national minority writers are already appearing on the scene.

Our works contain a great many new characters: heroes of the PLA and the Volunteers, labor models in the factories and countryside, Communists, members of the Youth League, new type women and children. They are not like the people described in earlier books—exploited and oppressed. Now they stand forth as masters of their own lives, as the creators of new China. Although these characters as portrayed are not typical enough, nevertheless, in varying degree they show the inherent strength of the new society. Through them we can see the excellent revolutionary character of the Chinese people and their lofty moral views. They mirror the immense influence which the social changes have wrought upon the spiritual life of the people.

The result has been an obvious transformation in the relationship between literature and the masses. Our literature is winning the interest and support of a daily increasing number of workers, peasants and soldiers. The scope of the popularization of literature has been considerably widened. Art and literature have become important ideological weapons in the lives of the masses. The circulation of books of literature is ten to twenty times that of pre-liberation. In 1952, motion picture attendance exceeded six hundred million. Literary and artistic activities have been initiated everywhere in factories, villages and in the armed forces. Many works have been adapted by the masses into folk operas and plays. The masses themselves have written numerous popular recitations and songs. In the past, the working people had little or no contact with works of literature and art. Today, they have become literature and art's basic readership and audience. The attitude and interest shown by the vast multitude of our readers are entirely different from before. Not only are they deeply interested in and in full support of our writers' creative efforts, they follow all our literary activities carefully. Readers' reaction, beside being very prompt, is highly enthusiastic and penetrating. Our authors and the editors of our various literary periodicals are constantly receiving many letters making valuable suggestions about our works. Readers in factories, in the armed forces, in government organizations, in the schools, are making increasing use of the forum method to discuss particular works of literature. The masses give their warmest support to all works of educational significance that reflect the essence of social development and that depict the new personalities imbued with the elevated character of the working people. They

oppose those dry and tasteless writings, based on mere subjective conceptions, that distort or are divorced from reality. The masses are always expressing their opinions, telling us what kind of works they want.

We should also take a look at the important changes that have taken place in our own ranks.

Four years ago there was considerable divergence of opinion among us about the literature and art policy of "serving the workers, peasants and soldiers." Some writers even had the wrong view, and as a result a dispute arose as to whether it was necessary to present workers, peasants and soldiers as the leading figures and positive characters in our creations. Many authors were confused ideologically and their standpoint was unsteady. In 1951, in conjunction with the criticism levelled at the reactionary motion picture, *The Life of Wu Hsun*, a wave of criticism and self-criticism regarding principles of creative work rose and surged across the country. With this as a basis, the nation-wide rectification movement in literature and art, which began in 1952, went a step further to criticize bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideas in literature. At the same time, writers were encouraged to plunge deeply into life and to correct their ideology. Recently we started a study of socialist realism, and are getting positive results.

This series of study, criticism and self-criticism has brought greater unity to our ranks on questions of ideology, aims and pace, and has strengthened our solidarity. New writers, with their buoyant youthfulness, are pushing the old writers forward. Old writers, with their creative experience, are helping the new writers. All the old writers now recognize the importance of taking a proletarian standpoint, of going deep into the life of the masses, of correcting their own ideologies, of striving hard to serve the people. They realize that the interests of the proletariat and the national interests are inseparable. Whether Communists or non-Party members, whether worker, peasant or petty bourgeoisie in origin, whether young or old—having gone through the rectification movement in literature and art and ideological reform, we writers are now all the more of the same aims and our solidarity, therefore, is all the firmer.

In the past four years our new writers have gradually increased in number. Today they are already the mainstay of our national literature's brilliant development.

According to incomplete figures, during this period 256 novels were published in book form; there also were 159 books of poetry, 265 books of dramas, and 896 books of essays and other writings. If we added to this the works that have appeared in various periodicals but which are not yet published in book form, the total would be even higher. The majority of writers of this large body of literature are new authors. Noteworthy among them are worker and peasant writers whose works have been welcomed by the masses. This formation and growth of new ranks on our literary front testify to the vast latent power of our country's literature.

Most of our new writers are young. Although their works are not yet very mature, these writers come from the worker and peasant masses and they have been forged in struggle. They are familiar with and love the working people ardently. Their perceptions of new things and new people are sharply attuned. They have complete faith in the inevitable victory of our national construction and of our transition to socialism. Educated by the Communist Party and by the people, their future is bright. Socialist realism in our country's literature will depend mainly on these new ranks for its growth. To educate and assist our new writers, therefore, becomes one of our primary present responsibilities.

These accomplishments, these profound changes in our literature during the past four years prove, first and foremost, that the advanced ideology of the working class has attained unshakable literary leadership. The interest which the Communist Party and Chairman Mao have taken in the literary movement and their teachings in this regard, particularly the directive of the Party's Central Committee in 1951 about *The Life of Wu Hsun*, are of great significance to the recent development of Chinese literature. Only under the leadership of working class ideology, only with the guidance of Communist Party policy, has our literary movement been able to develop correctly.

However, these big changes and this new atmosphere in our literature during the past four years are only a beginning. Compared to the speed of our political and economic construction, compared to the daily new and better life of the people, compared to the demands the masses are making on literature and art, our literary work has fallen far, far behind reality. The most we can say is that we have built the first part of a foundation for better fulfilling our new tasks.

Of course there are objective reasons why literary work is lagging behind reality. For instance, in the period just after liberation because of national necessity many literary workers took up administrative duties in government and other organizations, thereby weakening the literary front. But, it must be said, the main reason is that many subjective failings still persist in our work. This is demonstrated first by the fact that the artistic and ideological levels of our works generally are not high enough. Some of our writings describe new personalities, but these personalities often lack powerful, artistically convincing strength. Compared to the heroes who come forth every day in our real life, the heroes of our fiction are dull, colorless. In some of our works, the persons described can only be said to be embodiments of the author's subjective conceptions, not people drawn from life itself. It is very difficult, therefore, for these works to convey their political and ideological force through the medium of fictional personalities or to effectively fulfil the function of educating and improving the working people in a socialist spirit. Many of our writings, although describing the new life, often only itemize phenomena instead of treating these phenomena in accordance with Chairman Mao's teaching " . . . synthesize them, typicalize the contradic-

tions and struggles between them." Many of our authors are still unable to courageously depict the various contradictions in our social life, to penetrate to the heart of the contradictions, to describe the complicated class struggle under new conditions. When not glossing over the surface of contradictions and struggles, they are "solving" them by subjective methods. As a result, involved and bounteous social phenomena are transformed by the writer's pen into simple, one-sided affairs; they are molded into an arid formula. This, then, is the tendency condemned everywhere, to write from mere imagination or according to formulas.

The failings in our literary work are also manifested in the monotony and crudeness of our literary forms, in not taking pains with language and structure. Many of our writers and critics are still not adept at using our literary weapons skilfully and with care.

The chief responsibility of the All-China Association of Literary Workers with regard to the above enumerated shortcomings lies in the fact that it has failed to give adequate leadership in the sphere of literary ideology. Therefore these faults were not promptly and appropriately overcome.

I shall analyse and talk about the means of conquering these failings later on. What I want to point out here is that their existence denies us any right to complacency about the achievements mentioned above. (Of course, the existence of faults need not and should not make us lose heart.) These shortcomings have prevented our work from keeping up with our responsibilities, and now, as the revolution develops, new historical tasks are being placed before us, tasks still more difficult and complicated. Unless all of us strive with determination to overcome these faults and change the situation, not only will literary work continue to lag behind reality, but the distance between them will increase. The task of the present conference is to discuss and solve problems of this sort. Comrades, we believe these shortcomings and difficulties can be conquered. We should realistically appraise our gains to date, absorb past experience, while at the same time we unhesitatingly and firmly overcome our failings, improve our work and welcome, with complete confidence, the new tasks of our nation's new historical period.

What are our new tasks? Our country is now in the process of socialist industrialization and transition to socialism. No matter in what field of endeavor, no matter on what part of the front line, everyone must struggle to fulfil the over-all political task of bringing these aims to fruition throughout the land.

The struggle is hard and involved, but it is sure to succeed. In this transition stage, we must continue our struggle against foreign imperialism and against the concealed counter-revolutionary remnants. We must bring about a gradual reform of private capitalist business enterprises; that is to say, struggle against the bourgeoisie while uniting with it. Moreover, we must reform and educate our hundreds of millions of peasants and handicraft workers. In the process of transition

to socialism even more far-reaching changes than before will take place in the class relationships in our society, and these highly intricate changes will be reflected in our spiritual life.

Literature not only must mirror these changes truthfully, but what is especially important, it must employ the power of artistry to advance our transition to socialism. In other words, it must utilize socialist ideology to educate and reform millions. It must use the nobility and heroism of the working people to stimulate the courage and confidence of the millions to drive forward. Simultaneously, literature must wage an unrelenting struggle against the remnant feudal and imperialist ideological influences, fight capitalist ideology and any kind of thinking that resists socialist transformation, and attack such backward traits among the people as fear of difficulties, conservatism and selfishness. These are the important problems confronting us. Our job is to teach the great masses of the people, by means of true literary description, to correctly grasp not only the realities of today, but those of tomorrow as well. We must teach them to reform themselves and overcome obstacles in this complicated class struggle, to undertake the great historical task of building up our country and gradually advancing into socialism.

To perform these tasks, our literature, first of all, can have nothing other than socialist ideology for its content. Our writers can be nothing other than socialists or persons striving diligently to reform themselves into socialists. If we are to teach people to accurately understand reality, to look forward not backward, then we must demand of our works an ability to truthfully and concretely reflect reality. Our writings not only must portray the present, they must extend their outlook to the future, they must illuminate for the people the road ahead. In a word, works of literature shall be a means of bringing the people ideological education in socialism.

Every writer, therefore, must seriously require himself to work in accordance with the creative methods of socialist realism, to learn socialist realism still better, to become a good student of Marxism-Leninism.

Some people might wonder whether these requirements are not too exacting. I think such doubt is uncalled for; it stems from the fact that some people do not understand socialist realism sufficiently. Actually, socialist realism is not a new question in our country's literature. The Chinese revolutionary literary movement since "May Fourth" has been developing in the direction of socialist realism under the leadership of working class ideology. Particularly since Chairman Mao made his address at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art in 1942, socialist realism has been definitely established as the theoretical basis in Chinese literature. Therefore, the Chinese literary movement, led by the working class since "May Fourth," has advanced to a new stage. All of the creative principles which Chairman Mao pointed out in his address—including the stand and viewpoint of the author, whom to serve, the rela-

tionship between the writer and the masses, the attitude of the author to life and to study, the author's attitude toward acceptance of our cultural heritage, the creation of the typical, methods of criticism and so on—are these all not tenets of socialist realism? In the more than ten years that have elapsed since then, we have all been striving hard to follow the line of Mao Tse-tung in literature and art.

There may be some who say that since we have not yet become a socialist society, why stress socialist realism in literature?

This way of thinking must be rectified. In the first place, even when not describing a socialist society, a socialist writer still should employ the creative methods of socialist realism. A. Tolstoi's *Peter the Great* and Gorky's *Mother* are cases in point. In the second place, we are not without socialism today. On the contrary, in our politics, economics and culture, the powerful guiding strength of socialism has long since been present and is right now rapidly developing. Not only do we already have huge socialist enterprises existing in our life today, but a great number of bold advanced persons are creating conditions for the realization of a socialist society, while millions of working people have blossomed forth possessed of the sterling character of socialists. A socialist realist writer must require himself to be keen in perceiving the direction of life's development and the buds of new things, to be adept at portraying life in the midst of revolutionary development. It is the responsibility of the socialist realist writer to portray the things which will be common tomorrow though they may not yet be common today. The writer who cannot accurately see the realities of today and tomorrow will not be able to depict them accurately. This kind of writer cannot become a good realist.

In order to live up to our obligations, we must specifically acknowledge the superiority of socialist realist methods; we must strive, unrelentingly, to master them.

This is not to say, however, that we require every work today to attain a high level of socialist realism. Such a demand would be unrealistic. If our literature is to grow and mature robustly as it follows the road of socialist realism, a period of study and tempering is necessary. We must raise our level step by step in the course of actual writing and develop fully a variety of styles. It is ridiculous to make doctrinaire demands of any author to conform to certain definite "standards" or "rules" of socialist realism without taking his present level into consideration. This kind of critical method itself is the opposite of socialist realism; it is purely subjective.

On the other hand, we should not offer this or that reason as an excuse for refusing to go forward in the direction of socialist realism. We can never tolerate those ideas in our works which run counter to the interests of the working class and the people, nor can we allow the tendency against collectivism, the tendency against realism. We must use correct methods of criticism and self-criticism to overcome and remedy the shortcomings in our work. We can successfully apply the principles

of socialist realism only by means of constant study and ideological struggle in the course of actual writing.

As I have pointed out above, many shortcomings still exist in our literary work. We must analyse them and make a study of how to conquer them. For the sake of our future efforts, we must find specific solutions.

Creative method is the first problem. We have long been aware of a common tendency, persisting right up until now, towards writing from sheer imagination or to fit a formula.

Both of these methods are the product of subjective thinking. They are twin brothers. To write in this manner is contrary to the basic tenets of realism. It is to forget the fact that "revolutionary literature and art are products of the life of the people as reflected in the mind of the revolutionary writer or artist." It is to forget that the actual life of the people is the only source of literature and art. This way of writing is not based on objective reality but on subjective conceptions. It takes rich and complex real life and simplifies it into a few patterns fabricated out of the writer's suppositions. The resulting works, of course, can be neither true nor concrete. And, of course, the masses will not like them. The reason for the production of stories of this kind, the underlying cause, is that the writer has divorced himself from the life of the masses. This sort of thing is naturally very bad, but generally speaking it is not particularly common. What is much more general is the writer who has gone through a number of experiences in life, who has gone to a factory or to the armed forces or to a village, who has a certain amount of actual material at his command, but who turns out a work which none the less gives the masses only vague impressions, and which seldom has any artistic force. It is this situation that especially needs our analysis and study.

The primary problem, I feel, is that of the personalities of the characters created. The truthfulness of realism is chiefly manifested in characterization. Engels said, "Realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances." Thus, typical characters under typical circumstances is the fundamental question of the creative methods of realism. But some of our writers often ignore this fundamental question. They seize upon a few superficial phenomena in life, grab a pile of material which they have not digested mentally, and without waiting until characters mature in their minds, they rush to determine upon a theme. Then they go looking for characters to suit the necessity, or they fill characters into a ready-made formula. As Gorky has said the traits of such characters are pasted on their exteriors. This kind of character, naturally, has no clear-cut personality, no flesh and blood emotions, and so cannot be artistically convincing. We have some writers who constantly expend most of their effort in considering whether or not a theme is proper. This, of course, is fine; but precisely what the writer forgets is how to bring out his theme through description of his characters' personalities and the relationship

between those personalities and their surrounding circumstances. As a result, the theme does not emerge very well. This situation, it may be said, is quite common. The same serious failings were found in the scripts discussed at the conference of motion picture writers this year.

We want to call special attention to the fact that the personalities of the positive heroic characters in many of our works are weakly drawn. In many motion pictures, novels, dramas, the heroes—particularly those who are leaders—have no personality, they seem wooden and display no ideological brilliance. They appear on the scene as preachers or speech makers, far apart from the masses. They become idolized, the very thing against which Marx levelled his criticism. ("Deified Raphaelesque portraits of this kind lose all descriptive truth.") The main reason for this situation is that we authors are not yet sufficiently familiar with the new heroic figures, we have not yet been able to discover the noble character of the heroes and their typical positive attributes. Therefore we cannot deliberately magnify them or carve them in bold relief. Although we writers have interviewed and observed heroes in real life, and collected a great deal of material on them, we have not really understood their inner life, we have not recognized their process of development in the course of struggle, we do not even have enough passionate feeling for them. When we describe them, therefore, we cannot avoid representing them by our subjective conceptions, or putting them together by patchwork. As a result, our heroic characters lose their exuberance; they become dull, insipid figures.

We know that the characters of heroes are always developed in struggle. Without struggle there would be no heroes. Any writer who cannot or does not portray boldly the struggle between the forces of revolution and counter-revolution, of progress and backwardness, who does not describe heroic characters in the heart of the struggle—this writer cannot create fresh vivid figures who will stir and inspire the masses. (And so, when describing a struggle it is also necessary to delineate negative characters.) But in some of our works, our heroes are frequently isolated from the thick of the struggle. Instead of standing in its front ranks, they are in the rear or off to one side. Although the author tries hard to model their personalities, to depict their characteristics, to describe the details of their lives, because he presents them apart from contradiction and struggle, the personalities of these characters never develop, they are the same from beginning to end. They apparently have no particular connection with either the environment of the struggle or with the theme of the work. The author has portrayed characters only for the sake of portraying characters; he has not created typical characters under typical circumstances. Consequently, we cannot in these fictional persons see the profound content of the struggle; nor can we see, as the struggle progresses, the essential features of their class reflected in their personalities. There are even some characters, who, so far as the story is concerned, could have been just as well omitted. In works of this sort,

negative characters are usually unconvincing, abstract, mere caricatures. Thus, the work fails to ring true.

Secondly, another important question which cannot be separated from that of character delineation is how to portray contradiction and conflict in real life. Socialist realism requires the author to describe reality in the course of revolutionary development, truthfully and with historical concreteness. "... literature and art must boldly portray the contradictions and conflicts in life; they must learn to use the weapon of criticism as an effective means of education" (Malenkov). Many of our writers frequently lack this boldness, lack this kind of fighting spirit. We often easily turn aside in the face of life's contradictions and conflicts, or we simplify involved contradictions. Or we try to use formulas to solve them. For instance, in our countryside today we have, on the one hand, the peasant masses, already freed from feudal exploitation, standing as the finest ally of the working class in the struggle for socialism. On the other hand, the individual economy of small producers continues to exist on a large scale. Individual economy ideology still has its historical basis. Our agricultural technique is still backward. Against a background of strengthening the alliance between workers and peasants, the contradiction in the countryside between individual economy thinking and collective economy thinking is by no means a simple matter. Educating the peasants during the period of transition to socialism unquestionably is an extremely complicated task. We writers must realistically recognize and cope with the intricate nature of these problems. We certainly cannot treat these contradictions as questions that can be solved in the course of a morning. But in a number of our works describing agricultural producers' co-operatives and mutual-aid teams we often make a comedy of the contradictions, and give them a simple solution. It is very difficult to get a true picture of life in the countryside from works of this sort. They give the impression that the struggle for the collectivization of agriculture has already been smoothed into a grand highway, that intense effort is no longer necessary.

The same kind of thing happens in writings about war. In order to display the bravery of the PLA, the enemy is frequently and excessively described as incapable of withstanding a single blow. The bitterness of our struggle with the enemy and the great significance of our victory are therefore obscured. Some authors, in order to portray the spirit of optimism in battle, go in heavily for the "banter" and "jokes" of daily life. The result is that they weaken the war atmosphere, make it vapid. As a matter of fact, it is only by depicting the hardships of battle that we make heroism and optimism in battle stand out in salient relief. Otherwise, we lessen the reader's conviction in the genuineness of our depiction of war and blur the personalities of our characters.

We have a similar situation in works dealing with other subjects.

Because we lack the courage to boldly portray the contradictions and conflicts in life, we are still short of works which expose and satirize

negative figures and backward phenomena. That is to say, we are not yet able to fully utilize the power of literature to mercilessly scourge from life all that is decadent and moribund, all that hinders progress

How can this condition be explained?

The basic reason is, of course, that writers do not have a sufficient understanding of reality. Either they cannot see or they do not comprehend what the contradictions in real life are. They have no penetrating power of observation, they have not studied actual life; they lack the ability to make independent analyses, to make generalizations and pass judgments. Not having attained a sufficient ideological level and their experiences in life being limited, they frequently are dazed by superficial phenomena and cannot see the essentials. Naturally, the consequence is that they cannot distinguish between the essential and the non-essential, they cannot view the picture as a whole, they cannot grasp the relationship between the whole and the partial. And so, although they go into life, they cannot see the forest for the trees. Thus, of course, it is very difficult for their works to trenchantly depict life's contradictions.

The trouble with other writers is not that they have not seen contradictions and struggles in life, but that because they do not have a firm working class standpoint they have not thrown themselves whole-heartedly into the heat of the struggle and they lack the necessary fighting spirit. The result is they do not dare to confront contradictions boldly, to penetrate deeply into life and dig out these contradictions. They feel that since they are not one hundred per cent sure of their ground, it is better to write less, or not write at all. This is manifested in their works by an attitude of glossing over contradictions or deliberately avoiding them.

Then there is the writer who worries whether he will not be "exposing" the people's shortcomings if he describes the contradictions among them. This is completely wrong. We portray the contradictions in life precisely in order to show how the advanced elements—which in our life play the leading role in our contradictions—defeat the remnant backward elements. It is precisely by portraying these contradictions that we are able to display the powerfulness of our advanced elements. Of course, to do this, it is first necessary that the writer have a firm working class standpoint and strong confidence. If the author lacks this confidence, and takes a sceptical, gloomy view of life, he will be unable to correctly know and reflect the real struggles.

Comrade Malenkov tells us: "In their works our writers and artists must castigate the evils, sores and defects that exist in society and, in positive artistic images, depict the new type of people in all the magnificence of their human dignity and thereby help to train in the people of our society characters, habits and customs that are free from the evils and vices engendered by capitalism."

This, then, is the task of our socialist realism literature, and for this very reason we must oppose in our works the "theory of non-conflict" or any such tendency toward it. We must oppose the tendency to describe life while keeping apart from life. The creation of characters through portrayal of life's contradictions must be considered as an important problem in realism.

We come now to the question of the writer's understanding of life. It is a special characteristic of literature that it starts from an understanding of life, goes through a process of artistic contemplation, and results in the creation of images of life, using this creation to fulfil its obligation to educate and reform the people. As regards realistic creation, an understanding of life is, therefore, a question of a still more basic nature. It is the key to overcoming the above-mentioned tendencies toward creating from subjective conceptions and according to formulas, the key to raising the level of realism in our works. In the past two years, many writers have immersed themselves in factory, rural and army life. Many other authors have enthusiastically demanded this opportunity. This is a very good sign. For it is precisely by thus actually going deep into life that writers have been able to raise, in a still more practical manner, the question of understanding life.

There is quite a common failing among us to stress the observing and experiencing of life while relatively ignoring study and analysis of it. We are always talking about "going out to experience life." Naturally, experience is very necessary. What intellectuals frequently lack is a perceptual knowledge of worker and peasant life. But unless the observing and experiencing of life are combined with study and analysis, it still will be very difficult for us to generalize and synthesize life's complicated phenomena. Many writers, when they go to the life of the masses, at first find everything fresh and novel; then they gradually become confused. This, I feel, is connected with their failure to study and analyse life. As we know, social life is an entity. Whether in the factories, the countryside or the armed forces, none of life can be separated from the whole of society and its development. An author needs a special knowledge of some kinds of life. At the same time, he must have a broad knowledge of all kinds of life, plus a certain grasp of social history. Only in this way can he analyse and study a particular phenomenon as part of the whole and in its proper historical perspective; only in this way can he view the whole through the part, and through certain individuals or incidents reflect the magnificent atmosphere and spirit of the times. If we only limit ourselves to "experiencing life," we may get no further than a recognition of some superficial phenomena, and these phenomena will be all we shall be able to portray.

It is quite necessary for us to go to a factory or a village and use it as a base of operations. But this is not the same as saying that our whole world is only this factory or village, that our outlook is confined to the limits of this factory or village. The purpose of this so-called base

of operations is to supply us with a special familiarity with the environment of a certain kind of life so that we can observe and study all aspects of life more deeply and comprehensively. A writer must have a historical materialist viewpoint, a world and historical outlook. He must be far-sighted, and have as well rich concrete experience in and knowledge of life, he must have the heroism of the working class, plus a realistic approach. Only thus can he give us works broad in content and rich in color.

Whether it is to observe and experience or analyse and study life, an author must, in practice, go into the flames of the struggle; he cannot be a spectator. Actual participation in the struggle is not merely a question of whether the author takes on some particular job in a factory, in the countryside, or in the armed forces. What is more important is whether he approaches life and work from an advanced standpoint and with intense battle enthusiasm. If he lacks this standpoint and enthusiasm, then even if he undertakes some particular job he will still be only a spectator. He will not be able, through struggle, to make a more thorough observation, study and analysis of life, nor will he be able to experience it more fully.

While joining the life of the masses, the author should not forget his special calling—an engineer of the soul. It is all right to take on a particular job at an appropriate time. But whatever the time and wherever the place, the writer should continue to observe, experience, analyse and study all people, all of life and all forms of struggle. At the same time, he should write short pieces, like reports or sketches, at every opportunity. But under no circumstances should he let himself be carried away by a subjective impatience to succeed, and no sooner join the life of the masses than dash off an outline for a work of two or three hundred thousand words. That sort of plan is quite a risky proposition.

An understanding of life cannot be separated from study of Party theory and policy, because the Party theory and policy are guiding principles of objective truth, principles which generalize and synthesize lessons drawn from the life and struggles of the masses. A writer who does not make a serious study of Party theory and policy will not be able to really understand the life and struggles of the masses. Similarly, if he does not study life seriously, he will not be able to understand policy well, to reflect it in his writing. To writers who live with the masses, because they join more directly in the masses' life and struggles, the study of theory and policy is of especially practical significance. But it must be pointed out that Party theory and policy are only our guides when we go to observe, experience, analyse and study life. Policy provisions cannot replace life, cannot replace realism in literature. Hack writers arrange their plots and characters according to the provisions of policy. This is not studying policy, nor is it understanding life. Things written in this niggardly manner will never be works of literature.

I feel that the problems discussed above are the more important ones regarding our present creative work. We believe that these problems can be solved, that we can overcome our shortcomings.

In order to conquer our failings as creative writers, improve the ideological and artistic quality of our works, put into practice the principles of socialist realist creation, and enable our creations to accomplish successfully their mission in our present era, we must demand that our writers give primary consideration to the question of characterization, particularly to the problem of the creation of positive characters. Heroes like Huang Chi-kuang, Chang Ming-shan, Li Shun-ta and Ho Chien-hsiu come forth every day in our great country. Their splendid qualities and brave deeds stir and inspire the whole nation. But such heroic artistic images seldom appear in the pages of our literature. This is an extremely serious failing in our work. We should portray our heroes in our stories, motion pictures, dramas, poetry. We should depict them as more forceful, more synthesized, more typical, more ideal, more vital than they are in real life. Through them, we can more effectively educate and arouse the working millions on a much broader scale. At the same time we should carve sharp images of negative, hostile characters so as to stimulate the people's hatred and vigilance against them.

We should require our writers to boldly reflect, in a spirit of class struggle, the various contradictions in our social life during the period of transition to socialism. By means of these contradictions, they should teach the people to know what forces are being born, are new, advancing, irresistible, to know what forces are dying, old and rotten. Thus the growth of the new-born forces will be expedited, and the death of the old, decadent forces will be hastened.

We should require of our writers a broader, freer, richer, more colorful description of the various sides of life in our society, a wider selection of themes and material in their works, the creation of a greater variety of forms and styles.

In order to satisfy these requirements, writers must continue to penetrate deeply into life. They must learn to use a socialist viewpoint and attitude in seriously observing, experiencing, analysing and studying all people, all classes, all the masses, all the vivid forms of life and struggle, all the raw materials of literature and art. They should intensify their study of Marxism-Leninism, of Party policy, and continue striving for their own ideological reformation, thus to strengthen their ideological weapons and raise their political level. So far as writers are concerned, political study and its practical application to life are the basic problems at any time.

Comrades, life in our great country is so brilliant, our working people are so heroic and wise, our literary sources are so extensive and rich, as long as we strive earnestly we are entirely capable of creating works worthy of our era!

Writers have another important task—to temper and master artistic technique so as to raise the level of artistry in our works. A well-rounded artistic work must be tight in structure, give vivid descriptions of men and their surroundings in unaffected, graphic literary language. In poetry, there should be excellent rhyme and meter in addition. Artistic technique is not separate from the ideological content of a work, it depends on the content, it serves the content. The structure of a work and the way its characters are drawn, are themselves manifestations of ideology. Departing from ideological content and relying entirely on technique, a writer cannot express anything. We therefore must firmly oppose the bourgeois concept of pure technique and bourgeois formalism. Yet if a writer thinks he can give lively expression to correct ideological content in his works without possessing a certain technical ability—like saying in battle only strategy is needed, tactics are unnecessary—the result, unquestionably, will likewise be defeat. Consequently, we must, at the same time, firmly oppose the erroneous tendency to scorn or disown technique.

There is still another incorrect view: to admit the necessity for technique while maintaining that all the so-called technique of the past was either feudal or bourgeois, that it does not suit our needs, and that, therefore, we must “start from scratch.” This way of thinking gives rise to a tendency to ignore classical literature. Everyone is familiar with the golden rule laid down by Lenin that only by an exact knowledge of the culture created in the whole process of development of mankind, and only by reshaping this culture, can we build proletarian culture. We should follow the same kind of policy in regard to literary technique. That is to say, we should comply with the policy, so clearly indicated by Chairman Mao in his address at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art, of carrying on our literary heritage and further developing what is best in our traditional literature. Of course, the reference there primarily is to carrying on the people’s quality and the spirit of realism found in our classical literature. It is much bigger in scope than just learning technique.

It should be pointed out that we are not paying nearly enough attention to this question of technique in our creative work. Haphazard loose structure and muddled sloppy language have become quite common features. A great deal of very good material is often spoiled because of this. Due to the absence of literary technique, many works seem flat and dull to their readers. Thus, their ability to inspire and convince is lost or weakened.

A piece of writing should be an organic whole. In other words, characters and plot should not be added or cut at random. In writing his characters, plot, background and so on, the author should plan carefully. He should keep what is necessary and eliminate what should be left out. He should have long what should be long, and short what should be short.

Most of our works have had very little done to them in this regard. Apparently it never has occurred to some of our writers that raw material must be refined, that cutting according to the requirements of their themes is necessary. They frequently just make use of all the material they have on hand, without regard to quality or necessity. They cram it all in, and that's that. As a result, the structure of their works is bloated and flimsy, it never takes shape. Their books are jammed with characters, most of whom are either non-essential or downright superfluous. The development of the story and the sentiments of the characters are out of keeping with the circumstances described, and so the latter are unable to serve as a background which makes the former stand out sharply.

Description of surrounding circumstances must be connected with the actions and sentiments of the characters. Surroundings written of only as such becomes merely scenery propped up behind the players. A story should give vivid descriptions of the way the characters' actions, eyes and feelings respond to their surroundings. There are not a few examples of this kind of writing in our classical literature worthy of our study. Although life then was far different from ours today, the surroundings and characters depicted are still so clear and vivid we seem to see them right before us.

Many of our classical works use literary language with remarkable economy. In novels like *Water Margin*, *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Lives of the Literati*, extremely vivid scenes are often depicted with only one or two thousand words. China's ancient poetry, frequently presenting a complete picture in a few dozen words, is incomparable for its conciseness. It is this kind of tradition which should be the object of our intensive study and research.

Another important objective of artistic technique is to make the characters life-like. We describe a character so as to portray his personality and its development. Therefore, we must depict him through his specific actions together with the thoughts and sentiments he has in connection with these actions. He must grow as the story develops, and we must write of him from every angle, lest he appear one-sided, monotonous and dry.

Because some writers are weak at depicting a character through his actions, they devote their energies to describing his external features, hoping to impress the character on the reader's mind by this means. Of course we can write about the physical appearance of a character, but this should not be treated as the principal method of character delineation. The description of the outward appearance of the characters in some works is very careless, or very hackneyed. Sometimes, a writer stresses one or two peculiarities in his characters' physiognomy or movements, with the intention of thus bringing out their personalities more sharply. We may, of course, describe peculiarities, but not to the extent that a character is turned into a caricature.

Frequently not enough attention is paid to the proper disposition of major and minor characters. Some minor characters seem only to be used as foils for the major characters. They have no independent existence of their own; they are practically stage "props." On the other hand, we also have minor characters being given too large a role, to the detriment of the major characters.

Cutting, organization of the story, and character delineation are painstaking jobs. They cannot be done well except by means of repeated revisions. The artistic crudeness of some works is not necessarily due to the limitations of the author's ability; it arises from carelessness and the writer's unwillingness to devote more time to polishing. We must remember what Chairman Mao has told us:

"A piece of writing is a reflection of objective phenomena, and phenomena are intricate and complicated. Only by studying them over and over will we be able to reflect them properly. Carelessness in this regard indicates ignorance of the minimum knowledge required for writing." (Mao Tse-tung in *Oppose Party Jargon*.)

Another important question in literary technique is that of language.

Language is the basic material of works of literature. It should be expressive, graphic, accurate and concise. Then it can communicate the thoughts and sentiments the author wishes to express, then it can construct fresh, clear images. To express particular thoughts and sentiments, it is necessary to select appropriate words and phrases. Paucity of vocabulary and lack of variety in sentence structure makes for dull, dry, unattractive works. On the other hand, verbosity and the unprincipled use of freakish constructions will make a work long-winded, overgrown, and awkward. No one will read it to the end. We must confess that the existence of both of these faults is equally common.

How can we enrich our vocabulary? Chairman Mao has told us long ago:

"You must go to the masses to learn language. The vocabulary of the people is very rich, vivid and lively, expressing actual life. . . . We must draw from foreign languages the elements we need. We are not to borrow from and use foreign language indiscriminately, but only absorb from it what is good, what is useful to us. . . . We also must study the living things in the language of the ancients. Because we have not studied language hard, we have not made full and proper use of many things still alive and breathing in the language of the ancients. Of course, we firmly oppose using vocabulary and idioms which are already dead. That is definite. But we should carry on the things which are good and still useful." (Mao Tse-tung in *Oppose Party Jargon*.)

Facts prove that we have not acted correctly and seriously in accordance with Chairman Mao's teaching.

Particularly with regard to the advice to "study the living things in the language of the ancients," we have not been nearly diligent enough. Not only our young intellectuals, even quite a number of our professional

authors attach little importance to our classical literature. They have read *Water Margin* and the works of Lu Hsun all right, but I am afraid very few of them have been willing to make a painstaking study of these masterpieces. In his works, Lu Hsun utilized to the greatest possible extent the things still alive and breathing in the language of the ancients. But today, in most of our writings, we do not even carry on with what Lu Hsun has already used, to say nothing of digging things out ourselves. On the other hand, we still have not eliminated "vocabulary and idioms which are already dead."

Study of the language of the people has been relatively serious and has attained a certain amount of success. The best works of recent years all are strong in respect to colloquial speech. If the writings of most of our new authors had not drawn nourishment from the language of the people, we probably would have found the "vocabulary" in them even more meager than it is. At the same time, the unnecessarily extensive use of local dialects, the tendency to borrow unhealthy language from life without making any distinctions, are also very common. Vulgar puns appear frequently too. A pun is merely a play on words, it is not literary language. This over-use of local dialects and puns not only is unable to enrich vocabulary, it turns literary language into a crude jumble. We want to enhance our vocabularies, but at the same time we must pay attention to preserving the purity of our mother tongue.

Socialist realism allows writers to select various forms and to create various styles according to their personal tastes. It is one of the important tasks of our literary work, therefore, to enterprisingly create forms that can fully reflect the content of our new life and that the masses will enjoy. The creativeness with which a writer handles an art form is what constitutes his uniqueness of style. All of Lu Hsun's works are in his own excellent style. It is individuality of style that many of our writings of today lack. The creation and development of a variety of individual styles not only are unhindered by socialist realism—they are demanded by it.

We also require the development of many different kinds of literature. For instance, motion picture scripts, opera libretti, song lyrics and folk theatrical material can reach exceptionally large audiences, yet not many authors have been writing this type of literature. Motion picture scripts particularly are in short supply. We hope more writers will take an interest in their creation.

The strengthening and improvement of literary criticism are important conditions for expediting the growth and development of socialist realist literature.

Our literary criticism of the past few years has been of some benefit to our creative writing. In the course of analysing specific works it waged a struggle against bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideology in literature and art. It attacked creative methods that run counter to the principles of realism. It condemned the non-working-class thoughts and

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sentiments found in some works. It was very attentive to the writings of authors newly come from the ranks of the workers, peasants and soldiers, and encouraged these authors by promptly publicizing and introducing their works.

But taking an over-all view of literary criticism, we find it suffering from serious defects. It lags behind our creative writing. Literary criticism is not yet thoroughly fulfilling its function as creative writing's guide. It is not carrying out its obligation to help and teach writers with sufficient effectiveness.

Our literary criticism frequently fails to make complete and specific analysis of a work's content; it is subjective, doctrinaire, one-sided. It only castigates the shortcomings of a work without giving credit to its good points. Or it only hails the good points without being able to discover the basic faults. Literary criticism falls far short of analysing the ideological and artistic quality of a work carefully, scientifically and from every angle. Some books which have a nation-wide influence do not get any reaction from the critics, even long after their publication. Nor do our critics always sum up promptly controversies on creative writing.

Literary criticism is not guiding and helping new authors nearly enough either. Although our periodical editors seem to spend most of their time and energy reading the manuscripts of young writers and giving them suggestions, although the comrades in our editorial offices are working very hard, yet examining the picture as a whole we find it unsatisfactory. In the past four years there have been very few articles analysing the general situation of young writers and offering them guidance. We constantly stress the necessity of studying the best in our literary heritage, but our critics have not come forward with concrete examples to attract the attention of our writers in general and our young writers in particular.

It must be pointed out that some critics often are neither friendly, helpful nor co-operative in their attitude. Their approach is one of crude attack. This can be seen from the way they make hasty decisions based on momentary subjective impressions, rather than objectively and scientifically studying and analysing the object of their criticism. It can be seen from their lack of a deep and thorough knowledge of the social life portrayed in a work, from their treatment of principles of revolutionary literary theory as doctrines and formulas which they apply indiscriminately to whatever they are criticizing. It can be seen from the fact that they have not the patience to study an entire work in all its aspects, but merely seize upon and lift out of context obvious faults on the strength of which they pass unfair, unconvincing judgments.

It must also be pointed out that when subjective and doctrinaire criticism is the criterion, because it is not based on objective reality, not only is it incapable of solving anything, but in some cases it may even encourage writers to emulate it and also write according to formula. As

a result, such criticism gives impetus to the tendency to produce hackneyed, contrived works.

We want to call attention, too, to the fact that some critics give no consideration to the actual level of creative ability the writer has reached. They make impatient, unreasonable demands on writers, particularly on young writers. Other critics have a definite yardstick by which they measure all works. This kind of criticism dampens rather than fans the author's enthusiasm to create. Of course, writers should not be so easily discouraged, but unhealthy criticism must shoulder its share of the blame.

Naturally, it is also wrong to be scornful of or hostile to criticism. This discourages criticism. The authors themselves should be energetically and mutually helpful about creative writing, not consider criticism the job of the critics alone.

Criticizing a work not only helps the writer. More important, it educates the reader. Young people, their judgment immature, frequently take critical articles as their guide to reading. Criticism has an enormous social influence, and our critics have the heavy responsibility of teaching and guiding the readers.

The conquering of our faults in literary criticism and the development in it of socialist realism cannot be separated from the promotion of creative writing. They are equally important jobs. We therefore demand that our critics stand in the very front line of the ideological struggle, that they be well versed in Marxism-Leninism, that they have a thorough grasp of the methods of socialist realism in criticism, that they realistically analyse writings from a higher ideological level, so as to help the authors and teach the readers. Criticism should be treated as a serious scientific task for the benefit of the masses, not a work for the indulgence of whims. We must strictly insist that literary criticism be conducted according to principle, as is required by the critical standards of literature and art pointed out by Chairman Mao in his address at the Yenan Forum, and in this way advance the struggle on both the critical and creative fronts in literature and art.

Writers and critics should be required to co-operate closely. They should foster comradely criticism by helping and respecting each other, by learning from each other. Critics should consistently listen to the opinions of the masses and observe society. Before they can give the authors more effective help, they need an even broader knowledge of society than the authors, an even more systematic understanding of life, an ability to make still sharper distinctions between social phenomena.

The scientific literary theory of Marxism-Leninism, a basic knowledge of the history of our own and world literature, Soviet experience in literary creation—all these are necessary capital to the critic of literature. The fact that some of our criticism is nothing but a doctrinaire juggling of principles demonstrates how poorly we have armed ourselves with the literary theory of Marxism-Leninism. The literary

critic should devote a considerable part of his time to an intensified study of it.

In order to guarantee our fulfillment of the above-mentioned tasks, it is necessary to reorganize and strengthen the various literary organizations. The national committee, therefore, is recommending that the All-China Association of Literary Workers be converted into an association of Chinese writers. I consider this to be a correct proposal and a timely one. The presidium of the conference has drawn up a draft of the association's charter which they are going to present to the conference for discussion. The specific aims of the association are set forth in the "general program" of the charter. We feel that the association should be a voluntary organization of writers and critics who are actively participating in the revolutionary struggles of the Chinese people and in national construction by means of their creative writings and literary criticism. The major purposes of the association are proposed as follows:

1. Organize writers to create literary works which are socialist in ideology and possessing a high level of truthfulness. Strengthen the leadership of creative activity and of literary criticism. Make good use of the lessons of the past four years, and continue, according to plan and in an organized manner, to encourage writers to go deep into life. Study Marxism-Leninism, study the policies of the government and the Party, study the literary theory of socialist realism, and learn from the experience of Soviet literary creation. By means of organizing creative writing teams, foster friendly competition and mutual help among writers in the study of creative methods, while encouraging the development of a variety of literary forms and styles.

Place our literary criticism on the path of healthy development. While strengthening the leadership of this work, pay close attention to overcoming subjective, one-sided criticism. Help writers through the study and analysis of their works and apply the principles of socialist realism in the course of actual writing and criticism.

2. Strengthen the guidance of both the ideological approach and methods of our popularization of literature. Make the greatest possible efforts to train young writers, improve our guidance of them and those who are just learning to create, and propagate mature experience. Pay particular attention to the development of new writers from the ranks of the worker and peasant cadres, and to the advancement of the literary movement among our fraternal nationalities.

3. Using the viewpoint and methods of Marxism-Leninism, critically accept the classical literary heritage of China and the world. Collocate and study ancient and modern Chinese literature, and further develop the excellent traditions of Chinese national culture. Advance international cultural co-operation, increase cultural exchange among the nations of the world, and energetically join in the great struggle to preserve world peace and progressive culture.

These, then, are the purposes of the writers' association, the same common goals for which all of us are fighting

The new writers' association must be an organization of authors who work hard with youthful vigour, an association which leads literary creation and criticism in a serious, responsible way.

It is the duty of the writers' association to exercise its greatest efforts to lead us in the fulfilment of the above-mentioned tasks. All comrades who are members of the association should consider these tasks as their personal responsibility.

Comrade delegates: The great era of Mao Tse-tung gives us the best of conditions for each of us to exercise his capabilities to the full, for each to develop freely, for each to serve his people and his country. We are living in a great historical period of transition to socialism. Before us is the splendid prospect of socialist society. Under the leadership of the Communist Party and educated by communist ideology, we are confident that we shall fulfil our tasks. The potential strength of our country's literature is limitless. Our ranks become more powerful every day. Every day we are gaining healthy, fresh blood. Let us fight for the maturing of Chinese socialist realist literature, let us strive for the brilliant future of the literature of new China!

Two Stories

by Lu Hsun (1881—1936)

MY OLD HOME

BRAVING the bitter cold, I travelled back more than seven hundred miles to the old home I had left for over twenty years.

It was the depth of winter. As we drew near my former home the day became overcast and a cold wind blew into the cabin of our boat, while all one could see through the chinks in our bamboo awning were a few desolate villages scattered far and near under the sombre yellow sky, void of any sign of life. I could not help beginning to feel depressed.

Ah! Surely this was not the old home I had been remembering for the past twenty years?

The old home I remembered was not in the least like this. My old home was much better. But if you asked me to recall its peculiar charm or describe its beauties, I had no clear impression, no words to describe it. And now it seemed this was all there was to it. Then I rationalized the matter to myself, saying: Home was always like this, and although it has not improved, still it is not necessarily as depressing as I imagine; it is only my mood that has changed, because I am coming back to the country this time with no illusions.

This time I had come with the sole object of saying goodbye. The old house we had lived in for so many years had already been sold to another family, and was to change hands before the end of the year. I had to hurry there before New Year's Day to say goodbye forever to the familiar old house, and to leave far behind my familiar native village, moving my family to another place where I was working.

At dawn on the second day I reached the gateway of my home. Broken stems of withered grass on the roof, trembling in the wind, were making very clear the reason why this old house could not avoid changing hands. Several branches of the original family had probably already moved away, so that it was unusually quiet. By the time I reached the house my mother was already at the door to welcome me, and my eight-year-old nephew, Hung-erh, flew out after her.

Mother was very happy, but she was also trying to conceal a certain feeling of sadness. She told me to sit down and rest and have some tea,

but said nothing about the removal. Hung-erh, who had never seen me before, stood watching me at a distance.

But finally we had to talk about the removal. I said that rooms had already been rented elsewhere, and I had bought a little furniture; in addition it would be necessary to sell all the furniture in the house in order to buy more things. Mother agreed, saying that the luggage was nearly all assembled, and since the furniture could not be removed easily, about half of it had already been sold. Only it was difficult to get people to pay up.

"You can rest for a day or two, and call on our relatives, and then we can go," said Mother.

"Yes."

"Then there is Yun-tu. Each time he comes here he always asks after you, and wants very much to see you again. I told him the probable date of your return home, and he may be coming any time."

At this point a strange picture suddenly flashed into my mind: a golden moon suspended in a deep blue sky and beneath it the seashore, planted as far as the eye could see with jade-green watermelons, while in the midst a boy of eleven or twelve, wearing a silver necklet and grasping a steel pitchfork in his hand, was thrusting with all his might at a beaver which dodged the blow and escaped through his legs.

This boy was Yun-tu. When I first met him he was little more than ten—that was thirty years ago, and at that time my father was still alive and the family well off, so I was really a spoilt child. That year was the year for a big ancestral sacrifice in our family. This sacrifice came round only once in thirty years, hence it was an important one. In the first month the ancestral images were presented and offerings made, and since the sacrificial vessels were very fine and there was such a crowd of worshippers, it was necessary to guard against theft. Our family had only one part-time servant. (In our district we divide servants into three classes. those who work all the year for one family are called full-timers, those who are hired by the day are called dailies; and those who farm their own land and only work for one family at New Year or during festivals or harvests are called part-timers.) And since there was so much to be done, he told my father that he would send for his son Yun-tu to look after the sacrificial vessels.

When my father gave his consent I was overjoyed, because I had long since heard of Yun-tu and knew that he was about my own age, born in the intercalary month,¹ and when his horoscope was told it was found that of the five elements² that of earth was lacking, so his father called

¹ The Chinese lunar calendar reckons 360 days to a year, and each month comprises 29 or 30 days, never 31. Hence every few years a 13th, or intercalary, month is inserted in the calendar.

² In ancient China, as in ancient Greece, certain things were considered as the elements from which all else evolved. In China the five elements were metal, wood, water, fire, earth. One system of fortune-telling is based on the five elements.

him Yun-tu (Intercalary Earth). He could set traps and catch small birds.

After this I looked forward every day to New Year, for New Year would bring Yun-tu. At last the end of the year came, and one day Mother told me that Yun-tu had come, and I flew to see him. He was standing in the kitchen. He had a round, crimson face and wore a small felt cap on his head and a silver necklet on his neck, showing that his father doted on him and, fearing he might die, had made a pledge with the gods and buddhas, using the necklet to keep him safe from harm. He was very shy, and I was the only person he was not afraid of; but when there was no one else there, he would talk with me, so in a few hours we were fast friends.

I don't know what we talked of then, but I remember that Yun-tu was in high spirits, saying that since he had come to town he had seen many new things.

The next day I wanted him to catch birds.

"Can't be done," he said. "It's only possible after a heavy snow-fall. On our sands, after it snows, I sweep clear a patch of ground, prop up a big threshing basket with a short stick, and scatter husks of grain beneath; then when I see the sparrows coming to eat, from a distance I give a tug to the string tied to the stick, and the birds are caught in the basket. There are all kinds: wild pheasants, woodcocks, cuckoos, bluebacks. . . ."

Accordingly I looked forward very eagerly to snow.

"Just now it is too cold," said Yun-tu another time, "but you must come to our place in summer. In the daytime we will go to the seashore to look for shells; there are green ones and red ones, besides 'scare-devil' shells and 'buddha's hands.' In the evening when Dad and I go to see to the watermelons, you shall come too."

"Is it to look out for thieves?"

"No. If passers-by are thirsty and pick a watermelon, folk down our way don't consider it as stealing. What we have to look out for are small hogs, hedgehogs and beavers. When you hear a crunching sound under the moonlight, made by the beaver biting the melons, then you take your pitchfork and creep stealthily over. . . ."

I had no idea then what this thing called beaver was—and I am not much clearer now, for that matter—but I felt sure it was something like a small dog, and very fierce.

"Don't they bite people?"

"You have a pitchfork. You go across, and when you see it you strike. It's a very cunning creature and will rush toward you and get away between your legs. Its fur is as slippery as oil. . . ."

I had never known that all these strange things existed: at the seashore were shells all the colours of the rainbow; watermelons had such a dangerous history, yet all I had known of them before was that they were sold in the greengrocer's.

"On our shore, when the tide comes in, there are lots of jumping fish, each with two feet like a frog. . . ."

Yun-tu's mind was a treasure-house of such strange lore, all of it outside the ken of my other friends. They were ignorant of all these things, and while Yun-tu lived by the sea they, like me, could only see the four corners of the sky above the high courtyard wall.

Unfortunately, when the first month was over, Yun-tu had to go home. I burst into tears and he took refuge in the kitchen, crying and refusing to come out, until finally he was carried off by his father. Later he sent me by his father a packet of shells and a few very beautiful feathers, and I sent him presents once or twice, but we never saw each other again.

Now that my mother mentioned him, this childhood memory sprang into life like a flash of lightning, and I seemed to see my beautiful old home. So I answered:

"Fine! And he—how is he?"

"He? . . . He's not at all well off either," said Mother. And then, looking out of the door: "Here come those people again. They say they want to buy our furniture; but actually they just want to see what they can pick up. I must go and watch them."

Mother stood up and went out. Several women's voices could be heard outside. I called Hung-erh to me and started talking to him, asking him whether he could write, and whether he was glad to be leaving.

"Will we be going by train?"

"Yes, we shall go by train."

"And boat?"

"We shall take a boat first."

"Oh! Like this! With such a long moustache!" A strange shrill voice suddenly rang out.

I looked up with a start, and saw a woman of about fifty with prominent cheekbones and thin lips standing in front of me, her hands on her hips, not wearing a skirt but with trousersed legs apart, just like the compass in a box of geometrical instruments.

I was flabbergasted.

"Don't you know me? Although I have held you in my arms!"

I felt even more flabbergasted. Fortunately my mother came in just then and said:

"He has been away so long, you must excuse him for forgetting. You should remember," she said to me, "this is Mrs. Yang from across the road . . . She has a beancurd shop."

Then, to be sure, I remembered. When I was a child there was a Mrs. Yang who used to sit nearly all day long in the beancurd shop across the road, and everybody used to call her Beancurd Beauty. But she used to powder herself, and her cheekbones were not so prominent then nor her lips so thin; moreover she remained seated all the time, so that I had never noticed this resemblance to a compass. In those days

people said that, thanks to her, that beancurd shop did very good business. But, probably on account of my age, she had made no impression on me, so that later I forgot her entirely. However, the compass was extremely indignant and looked at me most contemptuously, just as one might look at a Frenchman who had never heard of Napoleon or an American who had never heard of Washington, and smiling sarcastically she said:

"You had forgotten? But naturally I must be beneath your notice. . . ."

"Certainly not . . . I . . ." I answered nervously, getting to my feet.

"Then you listen to me, Master Hsun. You have grown rich, and they are too heavy to move, so you can't possibly want these old pieces of furniture any more. You had better let me take them away. Poor people like us can do with them."

"I haven't grown rich. I must sell these in order to buy. . . ."

"Oh, come now, you have been made a governor, and do you still say you are not rich? You have three concubines now, and whenever you go out it is in a big sedan-chair with eight bearers, and do you still say you are not rich? Hah! You can't hide anything from me."

Knowing there was nothing I could say I remained silent, standing there without a word.

"Come now, really, the more money people have the more miserly they get, and the more miserly they are the more money they get. . ." said the compass, turning indignant away and walking slowly off, casually picking up a pair of Mother's gloves and stuffing them into her pocket as she went out.

After this a number of nearby members of the family and other relatives came to call. In the intervals between entertaining them I did some packing, and so three or four days passed.

One very cold afternoon, I was sitting drinking tea after lunch when I was aware of someone coming in, and turned my head to see who it was. At the first glance I gave an involuntary start, and hastily stood up and went over to welcome him.

The newcomer was Yun-tu. But although I knew at a glance that this was Yun-tu, it was not the Yun-tu I remembered. He had grown to twice his former size. His round face, crimson before, had become sallow and acquired deep lines and wrinkles; his eyes too had become like his father's with rims swollen and red, and I knew that most of the peasants who worked by the sea and were exposed day and night to the wind from the ocean were like this. He wore a shabby felt cap and just one very thin padded jacket, with the result that he was shivering from head to foot. He was carrying a paper package and a long pipe, nor was his hand the plump red hand I remembered, but coarse and clumsy and chapped, like the bark of a pine tree.

Delighted as I was, I did not know how to express myself, and could only say:

"Oh! Yun-tu—so it's you? . . ."

After this there were so many things I wanted to talk about, they should have poured out like a string of beads: wild pheasants, jumping fish, shells, beavers . . . But I was tongue-tied, unable to put all I was thinking into words

He stood there, pleasure and pathos showing on his face. His lips moved, but not a sound did he utter. Finally, assuming a respectful attitude, he said clearly:

"Sir! . . ."

I felt a shiver run through me, for I knew then what a lamentably thick wall had grown up between us. Yet I could not say anything.

He turned his head to call:

"Shui-sheng, bow to the master." Then he pulled forward a boy who had been hiding behind his back, and this was just the Yun-tu of twenty years before, only a little paler and thinner, and he had no silver necklet on his neck.

"This is my fifth," he said. "He has not seen any society, so he is shy and awkward."

Mother came downstairs with Hung-erh, probably after hearing our voices.

"I got the letter some time ago, madam," said Yun-tu. "I was really so pleased to know that the master was coming back. . . ."

"Now, why ever are you so polite? Weren't you playmates together in the past?" said Mother gaily. "You had better still call him Hsuan as before."

"Oh, you are really too. . . . What bad manners that would be. I was a child then and didn't understand." As he was speaking Yun-tu motioned Shui-sheng to come and bow, but the child was shy, and only stood stock-still behind his father.

"So he is Shui-sheng? Your fifth?" asked Mother. "We are all strangers, you can't blame him for feeling shy. Hung-erh had better take him out to play."

When Hung-erh heard this he went over to Shui-sheng, and Shui-sheng went out with him, entirely at his ease. Mother asked Yun-tu to sit down, and after a little hesitation he did so; then leaning his long pipe against the table he handed over the paper package, saying:

"In winter there is nothing worth bringing; but these few beans we dried ourselves there, if you will excuse the liberty, sir."

When I asked him how things were with him, he just shook his head.

"In a very bad way. Even my sixth can do a little work, but still we haven't enough to eat . . . and then there is no security . . . all sorts of people want money, and there is no fixed rule . . . and the harvests are bad. You grow things, and when you take them to sell you always have to pay several taxes and lose money, while if you don't try to sell, the things may go bad . . ."

He kept shaking his head; yet, although his face was lined with wrinkles, not one of them moved, just as if he were a stone statue. No doubt he felt intensely bitter, but could not express himself; he stopped speaking for a time, and taking up his pipe smoked silently.

Mother, knowing that he was busy at home, asked him when he must return, and found that he must go back the next day; and since he had had no lunch, she told him to go to the kitchen and fry some rice for himself.

After he had gone out Mother and I both shook our heads over his hard life: many children, famines, taxes, soldiers, bandits, officials, country landlords, all had squeezed him as dry as a mummy. Mother said that we should offer all the things we were not going to take away to him, letting him choose for himself.

That afternoon he picked out a number of things: two long tables, four chairs, an incense burner and candlesticks, and one steelyard. He also asked for all the ashes from the stove (in our part we cook over straw, and the ashes can be used to fertilize sandy soil), saying that when we left he would come to take them away by boat.

That night we talked again, but not of anything serious; and the next morning he went away with Shui-sheng.

After another nine days it was time for us to leave. Yun-tu came in the morning. Shui-sheng had not come with him—he had just brought a little girl of five to watch the boat. We were very busy all day, and had no time to talk. We also had quite a number of visitors, some to see us off, some to fetch things, and some to do both. It was nearly evening when we got on the boat, and by that time everything in the house, however old or shabby, large or small, fine or coarse, had been cleared away.

As we set off, the green mountains on the two banks became deep blue in the dusk, receding toward the stern of the boat.

Hung-erh and I, leaning against the cabin window, were looking out together at the indistinct scene outside, when suddenly he asked:

“Uncle, when shall we go back?”

“Go back? Do you mean that before you’ve left you want to go back?”

“Well, Shui-sheng has invited me to his home. . . .” He opened wide his black eyes in anxious thought.

Mother and I both felt rather sad, and so Yun-tu’s name came up again. Mother said that ever since our family started packing up, Mrs. Yang from the beancurd shop had come over every day, and the day before in the ash-heap she had unearthed a dozen bowls and plates, which after some discussion she insisted must have been buried there by Yun-tu, so that when he came to remove the ashes he could take them home at the same time. After making this discovery Mrs. Yang was very pleased with herself, and flew off taking the dog-teaser with her. (The dog-teaser is used by poultry keepers in our part. It is a wooden cage

inside which food is put, so that hens can stretch their necks in to eat but dogs can only look on furiously.) And it was a marvel, considering the size of her feet, how fast she could run.

I was leaving the old house farther and farther behind, while the hills and rivers of my old home were receding too gradually ever farther in the distance. But I felt no regret. I only felt that all round me was an invisible high wall, cutting me off from my fellows, and this made me thoroughly depressed. The vision of that small hero with the silver necklet among the watermelons had formerly been as clear as day, but now it had suddenly blurred, making me thoroughly depressed.

Mother and Hung-erh fell asleep.

I lay down, listening to the water rippling beneath the boat, and knew that I was going my way. I thought: although there is such a barrier between Yun-tu and myself, our children still have much in common, for wasn't Hung-erh thinking of Shui-sheng just now? I hope they will not be like us, that they will not allow a barrier to grow up between them. But again I would not like them, because they want to be one, to struggle like myself through hardships, nor to suffer like Yun-tu until they become stupefied, nor yet, like others, to devote all their energies to dissipation. They should have a new life, a life we have never experienced.

The access of hope made me suddenly afraid. When Yun-tu had asked for the incense burner and candlesticks I had laughed up my sleeve at him, to think that he was still worshipping idols and would never put them out of his mind. Yet what I now called hope was no more than an idol I had created myself. It was just that what he desired was close at hand, while what I desired was less easily realized.

As I dozed, a stretch of jade-green seashore spread itself before my eyes, and above a round golden moon hung from a deep blue sky. I thought: hope cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist. It is just like roads across the earth. For actually the earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made.

January, 1921

FORGING THE SWORD

I

Mei Chien Chih had no sooner lain down to sleep beside his mother than rats, coming out to gnaw at the wooden lid of the pan, got on his nerves. He gave a few soft hoots, which had some effect to begin with, but later the rats simply ignored him, crunching and munching as they pleased. And he dared not make a lot of noise to drive them away, for fear of waking his mother who had so tired herself out during the day that she fell asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow.

After a long time things quietened down. He was about to sleep, when a sudden splash made him open his eyes again. At the same time he heard the rasping of claws scrabbling against earthenware.

"Good! Devil take you!" he thought. Delighted, he sat up quietly.

He got down from the bed, and picked his way by the light of the moon to behind the door, where he groped for the fire stick, lit a pine torch and lighted up the water container. Sure enough, a huge rat had fallen in. But since there was not much water left, it could not get out, and was just circling round, scrabbling at the side of the cistern.

"Serves you right!" When he thought that these were the creatures that gnawed the furniture every night and kept him awake with their noise, he was very pleased. He stuck the torch into a small hole in the mud wall, to enjoy the sight; but presently he was so revolted by its beady eyes, he reached for a stick and pushed the creature under the water. After a time he removed the stick and the rat, floating up, went on circling round and scrabbling at the side of the cistern again. Only it clutched less powerfully than before, and its eyes were under water—all that could be seen was the red tip of its small pointed nose, snuffing desperately.

Recently he had felt considerable dislike for red-nosed people. Yet now the sight of this small, pointed red nose struck him as pathetic, so he took the stick again and thrust it under the rat's belly. The rat clutched at it, and after recovering its breath clambered up it. When its whole body could be seen—sopping black fur, bloated belly, worm-like tail—it struck him again as disgusting and beastly, and he hastily shook the stick, so that the rat dropped back with a splash into the cistern, where he hit it several times over the head with the stick, to make it sink.

When the pine torch had been changed six times, the rat could no longer stir, and was just floating submerged in the middle of the jar, from time to time straining slightly towards the surface of the water. Once more Mei Chien Chih was seized with pity. He broke the stick in two, and with considerable difficulty fished the creature up and put it on the floor. To begin with, the rat didn't budge, then it took a breath; after

a long time its four feet twitched and it turned over, as if wanting to stand up and make off. This gave Mei Chien Chih a turn, and without thinking he raised his left foot and brought it heavily down. There was a squelching sound. When he squatted down to look, there was fresh blood at the corner of the rat's mouth—it was probably dead

He felt very sorry for it again, and as miserable as if he had done something really criminal. He squatted there, staring, unable to get up.

By this time his mother was awake

"What are you doing, son?" she asked from the bed

"A rat . . ." He got hastily to his feet and turned round, answering briefly.

"A rat, yes. I know. But what are you doing? Killing it, or saving it?"

He made no answer. The torch had burnt out. He stood there silently in the darkness, accustoming his eyes to the pale light of the moon

His mother sighed

"After midnight you'll be sixteen, but you're still so soft. You don't change at all. It looks as if your father will have no one to avenge him."

Sitting in the grey moonlight his mother seemed to be trembling all over, and in her low tones was such infinite grief, it made him shiver. The next moment he felt hot blood racing through his body.

"Avenge father? Does he need avenging?" he demanded in amazement, stepping forward

"He does. And you must do it. I wanted to tell you long ago, but you were too small, so I said nothing. Now you're not a child any more, yet you still act like one. I just don't know what to do. How can a boy like you carry off a real man's job?"

"I can. Tell me, Mother. I'm going to change . . ."

"Of course. I can only tell you. And you'll have to change . . . Well, come over here."

He walked over. His mother was sitting stiffly on the bed, her eyes flashing in the shadowy white moonlight

"Listen!" she said gravely. "Your father was famed for the sword he forged—he was the best smith in the land. I've sold all his tools to keep us from starving, so there's nothing left for you to see. But he was the best sword maker in the whole world. Twenty years ago, the king's concubine gave birth to a piece of iron. They said she conceived after embracing an iron pillar. It was pure, transparent iron. The king realized this was a rare treasure, and decided to have it made into a sword with which he could defend his kingdom, kill his enemies and safeguard himself. As ill luck would have it your father was chosen for the task, and he brought the iron home. He tempered it day and night for three whole years, until he had forged two swords.

"The day that he opened his furnace for the last time, a most frightening thing happened! A column of white vapour billowed into the air, and the earth shook. The white vapour changed into a white cloud which

covered this spot, then gradually turned a deep red and cast a rosy light over everything. In our pitch black furnace lay two red hot swords. As your father sprinkled them slowly with clear well water, the swords hissed and spat, and gradually turned grey. After this had gone on for seven days and seven nights, the swords disappeared. Only if you looked carefully could you see that they were still in the furnace, pure and transparent as two icicles.

"A look of great happiness flashed from your father's eyes. He picked up the swords and stroked them again and again. Then lines of sadness appeared on his forehead and at the corners of his mouth. He put the swords in two caskets.

"'You've only to look at the portents there have been the last few days, to realize that everybody must know the swords are forged,' he told me softly. 'Tomorrow I must go to present a sword to the king. But the day that I present it will be the last day of my life. I'm afraid we shall never meet again.'

"Horried, I wasn't sure what he meant, and didn't know what to say. 'You've done this work so well,' was all I found to murmur.

"'Ah! You don't understand!' he exclaimed. 'The king has always been very suspicious and cruel. Now I've forged him a sword the equal of which has never been seen; he's bound to kill me, so that I can never forge one for anyone else to come and rival him or surpass him.'

"I shed tears.

"'You mustn't be unhappy,' he said. 'There's no way out of this. Tears can't wash away fate. I've been preparing for this a long time.' His eyes seemed to dart lightning, as he placed a casket with one of the swords in it on my knee. 'This is one of the pair,' he told me. 'You keep it. Tomorrow I shall take its fellow to present to the king. If I don't come back, you'll know I'm dead. Won't you be brought to bed in four or five months? Don't be unhappy, but bear our child and bring him up well. As soon as he's grown up, give him this sword, and tell him to cut off the king's head with it, to avenge me!'

"Did my father come back that day?" demanded the boy hastily.

"He did not!" she replied calmly. "I asked everywhere, but there was no news of him. Later someone told me that the first to stain with his blood the sword forged by your father was your father himself. For fear his ghost should haunt the palace, they buried his body at the front gate and his head in the back garden!"

Mei Chien Chih's whole body seemed burnt by a fierce fire, and he felt there must be sparks flashing from every hair on his head. He clenched his fists in the dark till the knuckles cracked.

His mother stood up, and lifted aside the board at the head of the bed. Then she lit a torch, took a farm tool from behind the door and handed it to her son, saying "Dig!"

The lad's heart was pounding, but he dug calmly away, stroke after stroke. He scooped out brown earth till he had dug down over five feet,

when the colour of the earth changed, as if there were some rotten wood in it.

"Look! Careful now!" exclaimed his mother.

Mei Chien Chih crouched beside the hole he had made, and stretched down his hand. Very gingerly he shifted the rotted wood until the tip of his finger touched something as cold as ice; and the pure, transparent sword appeared. He made out where the hilt was, grasped it, and lifted it out.

The moon and stars outside the window and the pine torch inside the room suddenly seemed to lose their brightness, and the world to be filled with a steely light. And in this steely light the sword dissolved and apparently disappeared. But when the lad looked closely he saw something over five feet long, which didn't look particularly sharp—in fact the blade was rounded like a leek.

"You've got to stop being soft now," said his mother, "and take this sword to avenge your father!"

"I've already stopped being soft. I'll take this sword to avenge my father!"

"I hope so. You'd better put on a grey coat, and strap the sword to your back. With coat and sword the same colour, nobody'll be able to see it. I've already got the coat ready for you here." His mother pointed at the shabby chest behind the bed. "Tomorrow you can set out. Don't worry about me."

Mei Chien Chih took out the new coat and found, when he tried it on, that it fitted him perfectly. Then he folded it up again, wrapped up the sword, placed it by his pillow, and lay down calmly. He believed he had already stopped being soft. He determined to act as if he had nothing on his mind, to fall straight asleep, and to wake the next morning looking as usual, then set out confidently in search of his mortal enemy.

However, he couldn't sleep. He tossed and turned, and kept wanting to sit up. He heard his mother's long, soft, hopeless sighs. Then he heard the first crow of the cock and knew that a new day had come, and he was sixteen.

II

When Mei Chien Chih crossed the threshold without a look behind, there was as yet no light in the east. His eyes swollen, dressed in the grey coat with the sword on his back, he strode swiftly toward the city. The night air still hid in the dew that clung to the tips of the leaves in the pine wood. But by the time he reached the other end of the forest, the dew drops were sparkling brightly, and dawn had broken. Far ahead he thought he could see the dark grey, crenellated walls of the city.

Mingling with the vegetable vendors, he entered the city where the streets were already full of bustle and activity. Men were standing about

idly in groups, while every now and then women looked out from their doors. Most of their eyes were still swollen from sleep too, their hair was uncombed, and their faces were pale as they had had no time to put on rouge.

Mei Chien Chih sensed that something big was about to happen, something which all these people were eagerly yet patiently awaiting.

As he advanced, a child darted over and almost knocked into the point of the sword on his back, making him break into a cold sweat. Turning north, not far from the palace, he found the people packed closely together, craning their necks toward the road. The cries of women and children could be heard from the crowd. Afraid his invisible sword might hurt someone, he dared not push his way forward; but people were pressing up from behind. He had to move out of their way, till all he could see was the backs of people in front of him, craning their necks.

All of a sudden, the people in front knelt down one after the other; in the distance he could see two riders galloping forward side by side. They were followed by warriors carrying batons, spears, swords, bows and flags, who raised a cloud of dust. After them came a large cart drawn by four horses, in which sat a band sounding gongs and drums, and blowing some strange musical instruments. Behind were carriages with courtiers in bright clothes, old men or short, puffy fellows, their faces glistening with perspiration. These were followed by a troop of riders bearing swords, spears and halberds. Then the kneeling people prostrated themselves. Mei Chien Chih saw a great carriage with a yellow canopy drive up, in the middle of which was seated a fat man in bright clothes. He had a grizzled beard and small head, and seemed to be wearing at his side a sword like the one on his own back.

The lad gave an instinctive shudder, but immediately was afire again, as if flames were burning him. Stretching his hand to grip the sword on his back, he picked his way forward between the necks of the kneeling crowd.

But he had only taken five or six steps when someone tripped him up and made him fall headlong on top of a young fellow with a wizened face. He was afraid the point of his sword might have hurt him, and was getting up nervously to see, when he received two hard punches in the ribs. Without stopping to protest he looked again at the road, but not only had the carriage with the yellow canopy passed, even the mounted attendants behind it were already some distance away.

The people on both sides of the road got up again. The youngster with the wizened face had kept hold of Mei Chien Chih's collar, and wouldn't let him go. He accused him of crushing his solar plexus, and ordered him to guarantee that if he died before he was eighty, the boy would pay for it. Idlers crowded round to gape, but none of them said anything; then a few bystanders let fall some jokes and curses, taking the side of the wizened young man. In face of such enemies, Mei Chien

Chih didn't know whether to laugh or lose his temper. It was annoying, yet he couldn't get away.

This went on for the time it takes to cook a pan of millet. By then Mei Chien Chih was afire with impatience, yet still the onlookers did not disperse, but went on watching as avidly as ever.

Then a dark man pushed his way through the knot of people. He had black hair, black eyes, and was as lean as a rake. Without a word, he smiled coldly at Mei Chien Chih, and raised his hand to flick the jaw of the youngster with the wizened face, and looked steadily into his eyes. The youngster returned his stare for a time, then slowly let go of the boy's collar, and made off. The dark man made off too, and the crowd drifted disappointed away. Only a few people came up to ask Mei Chien Chih his age and address, and whether he had sisters at home. But Mei Chien Chih ignored them.

He walked south, thinking since there was so much bustle and activity in the city it would be easy to wound someone by accident, and he would do better to wait outside the south gate for the king to come back, and then avenge his father. There was plenty of space there, and not too many people; it was really the best place for what he had to do. By now all the citizens were discussing the king's trip to the mountain, his retinue, his majesty, what an honour it was for them to see the king, how low some had prostrated themselves, and how they should be considered as exemplary citizens. They were buzzing about like bees. Only near the south gate did things become quieter.

He walked out of the city and sat under a big mulberry tree, where he ate two rolls. As he was eating he thought of his mother, and felt a lump in his throat, but presently that passed. All around grew quieter and quieter, until he could hear his own breathing quite distinctly.

As dusk fell, he grew more and more uneasy, and strained his eyes ahead, but not a sign could he see of the king. The villagers who had taken vegetables to the city to sell were one by one going home with empty baskets.

Long after all these peasants had passed, the dark man came quickly out from the city.

"Run, Mei Chien Chih! The king is after you," he said. His voice was like the cry of an owl.

Mei Chien Chih trembled from head to foot. Then, as if under a spell, he followed the dark man, and presently they were running at full speed. He stopped to pant for a while before he realized they had reached the edge of the pine wood. Far behind were silver rays, where the moon was rising; but in front all that could be seen were the dark man's eyes blazing like will-o'-the-wisps.

"How did you know me? . . ." the lad asked in fear and amazement.

"I've always known you." The man laughed. "I know you carry a sword on your back to avenge your father. And I know you will fail. Not only will you fail to avenge him, but today someone has informed

against you. Your enemy went back to the palace long ago by the east gate, and has issued an order for your arrest."

Mei Chien Chih began to feel wretched.

"Oh, no wonder Mother sighed," he muttered.

"But she only knows half. She doesn't know that I'm going to take vengeance for you."

"You? Are you willing to take vengeance for me, sir knight?"

"Ah, don't insult me by calling me that"

"Well then, is it because you sympathize with widows and orphans?"

"Don't use names that have been sullied, child," he said sternly. "Knighthood, sympathy and all the rest used to be clean, but now they've become capital for usurers. I set no store by these things. I only want to avenge you!"

"Good. But how will you do it?"

"I only want two things from you." His voice sounded from beneath two burning eyes. "What two things? I'll tell you: one is your sword, the other is your head!"

Although Mei Chien Chih thought the request strange and hesitated, he was not afraid. But for a moment he remained speechless.

"Don't be afraid that I want to trick you out of your life and your treasure." The voice sounded sternly again in the dark. "It's entirely up to you. If you trust me, I'll go to kill the king; if you don't, I won't."

"But why are you going to take vengeance for me? Did you know my father?"

"I knew your father all along, just as I've always known you. But that's not why I want to take vengeance. You don't understand, my boy, how good I am at revenge. What's yours is mine, and what concerns others concerns me too. I bear on my soul so many wounds inflicted both by others and by myself, that I already hate myself!"

As soon as the voice in the dark stopped, Mei Chien Chih raised his hand to grasp the grey sword on his back and with the same movement swung it forward from the nape of his neck, so that his head fell on the green moss at his feet even as he handed the sword to the dark man.

"Ah!" He took the sword with one hand, and with the other picked up Mei Chien Chih's head by its hair. He kissed the warm, dead lips twice, and gave a cold, shrill laugh

His laughter spread straightway through the pine wood, and immediately, deep in the forest, flashed blazing eyes, which, in a second, came so close that you could hear the snuffing of hungry wolves. With one bite Mei Chien Chih's clothes were torn completely off him; with another, his whole body disappeared, and the blood was instantaneously licked clean, while all that could be heard was the soft crunching of bones.

The huge wolf at the head of the pack hurled itself at the dark man. But with one sweep of the grey sword, its head fell on the green moss at his feet. The other wolves with one bite tore off its skin, with another

its whole body disappeared, and the blood was instantaneously licked clean, while all that could be heard was the soft crunching of bones.

The dark man picked up the grey coat from the ground to wrap up Mei Chien Chih's head, and fastened this and the grey sword onto his back. Then he turned on his heel, and swung off through the darkness toward the capital.

The wolves stood stock-still, hunched up with lolling tongues, panting watching him with green eyes as he strode away.

He swung through the darkness toward the capital, singing in a shrill voice as he went:

*The single one who loved the sword
Has taken death as his reward
Those who go single are galore,
Who love the sword are alone no more!
Foe for foe, ha! Head for head!
Two men by their own hands are dead*

III

The king could take no pleasure in his trip to the mountain and the secret report that there was an assassin lying in wait for him made him go back feeling even more depressed. He was in a very bad temper that night, and complained that even the ninth concubine's hair was not as black and glossy as the day before. Fortunately, she perched herself affectionately on his royal knee, and wriggled specially over seventy times until the wrinkles on his kingly brow were gradually smoothed out.

When the king got up after noon the next day he was in a rather bad mood again, and by the time he had had lunch, he was furious.

"I'm bored!" he bellowed, with a great yawn.

This threw everyone from the queen down to the court jester into a panic. The king had long been sick and tired of his old ministers' sermons and the clowning of his plump dwarfs, recently he had even been finding marvellous tricks like tightrope walking, pole climbing, juggling, somersaulting, sword swallowing and fire spitting quite unpalatable. He was given to bursts of rage, in which he would draw his sword and look for some trifling fault so that he could kill a few people.

Two eunuchs who had slipped out of the palace to play truant had just come back. When they saw the general air of gloom in the court they knew that great trouble was brewing again, and one of them turned pale with fear. The other, however, looked very confident. He ran to his master unhurriedly to the king's presence, where he prostrated himself and said:

"Your slave has just met a remarkable man with rare abilities. He will be able to amuse Your Majesty. I have come to inform Your Majesty of this."

"What?!" The king never wasted words.

"He's a lean, dark fellow, who looks like a beggar. He's dressed in grey, has a round grey bundle on his back, and he keeps singing snatches of strange doggerel. Asked what he does, he says he can do a wonderful trick, the equal of which has never been seen—it has no match in the world. No one has ever seen the like before. The sight will put an end to care and bring peace to the world. But when people ask him to perform, he refuses. He says he must have first a golden dragon, second a golden cauldron. . . ."

"A golden dragon? That's me. A golden cauldron? I have one."

"That's just what I thought. . . ."

"Bring him in!"

Before the king's voice had died away, four guards hurried out with the eunuch. Everyone from the queen down to the court jester beamed with delight. They all hoped this conjuror could put an end to care and bring peace to the world. And even if the show fell flat, there would be the lean, dark beggarly looking fellow to bear the brunt of the royal displeasure. If they could last till he was brought in, all would be well.

Presently six men could be seen hurrying toward the throne. The eunuch led the way, the four guards brought up the rear, and in the middle was a dark man. As they drew near, it was seen that this man was wearing a grey coat, his beard, eyebrows and hair were black, and he was so thin that his cheekbones stood out and his eyes were sunken. As he knelt respectfully to prostrate himself, a small round bundle could be seen on his back, wrapped in grey cloth with a dark red pattern.

"Well!" shouted the king impatiently. This fellow's paraphernalia looked so simple, the king doubted whether he could do any good tricks.

"Your subject's name is Yen-chih-ao-che, born in Wenwen Village. I wasn't bred to any trade, but when I was grown I met a sage, who taught me to conjure with a child's head. I can't do this alone, though. It must be in the presence of a golden dragon, and I must have a golden cauldron, filled with clear water, heated with charcoal. Then when the child's head is put in, and the water boils, the head will rise and fall, and dance all manner of figures. It will make wonderful sounds too, and laugh and sing. Whoever hears its song and sees it dance will know an end to care, while if all the people see it, the whole world will have peace."

"Go ahead!" the king ordered loudly.

Before long a great golden cauldron, big enough to boil an ox, was set before the throne and filled with water, and charcoal was lit under it. The dark man stood at one side, and when he saw the charcoal was red he put down his bundle and undid it, then picked up the child's head in both hands, and held it high. It had fine eyebrows and brilliant eyes, white teeth and red lips, and a smile played round its mouth. Its tangled hair was like faint smoke. The dark man raised it high and turned round for all to see, then held it over the cauldron while he muttered something,

and finally dropped it so that it fell with a splash into the water. Foam flew up at least five feet high, and after that all was still again.

For a long time nothing happened. The king grew impatient, and the queen and concubines, ministers and eunuchs began to feel alarmed, while the plump dwarfs were beginning to sneer. When the king saw their sneers, he felt he was being made a fool of, and turned to the guards, meaning to order them to have this oaf who dared deceive his monarch thrown into the great cauldron and boiled to death.

However, that very instant he heard the water bubbling; the charcoal was crackling away too and casting a ruddy glow over the dark man, so that he looked like iron that had turned a faint red. As soon as the king turned back again, the dark man lifted both hands towards the sky, stared into space, danced, and suddenly started singing in a shrill voice:

*Sing hey for love, for love reign ho!
Ah, love! Ah, blood! Who is not so?
Men grope in dark, the king laughs loud,
Ten thousand heads in death have bowed.
I only use one single head,
For one man's head let blood be shed!
Blood—let it flow!
Sing hey, sing ho!*

As he sang, the water in the cauldron seethed up conewise like a small mountain; but from its tip to the bottom of the cauldron it remained flowing and eddying all the time. The head bobbed up and down with the water, skimming round and round, nimbly turning somersaults as it went, and people could make out a smile of pleasure on its face. After some time it gave this up to start swimming against the stream, encircling, weaving to and fro, and splashing water in all directions so that hot drops showered the court. One of the dwarfs gave a sudden cry, and rubbed his nose. He had been scalded, and couldn't help crying out with the pain.

As soon as the dark man stopped singing, the head stopped in the middle of the water, facing the throne, assuming a grave expression. After staying like this for a few seconds, it began bobbing up and down slowly again. From bobbing it speeded up to swim up and down, not very quickly but extremely gracefully. It swam three times around the edge of the water, ducking up and down, then opened its eyes wide, the jet black pupils looking unusually brilliant, as it opened its mouth to sing:

*The sovereign's rule spreads far and wide,
He conquers foes on every side.
The world may end, but not his might,
So here I come all gleaming bright.
Bright gleams the sword—forget me not!
A royal sight, but sad my lot.*

Sing hey, sing ho, a royal sight!

Come back, where gleams the bright grey light.

The head suddenly stopped at the crest of the water. Then, after turning several somersaults, it started plying up and down again, looking to right and to left very bewitchingly, as it sang once more:

Heigh ho, for the love we know!

I cut one head, one head, heigh ho!

I use one single head, not more,

The heads he uses are galore! ..

By the fifth line of the song, the head was submerged, and since it did not come up again, the singing could not be heard distinctly. As the singing grew fainter, the seething water gradually sank back like an ebbing tide, until it was below the rim of the cauldron, so that from a distance nothing could be seen.

"Well?" demanded the king impatiently, after waiting for a little.

"Your Majesty," the dark man went down on one knee, "it's dancing the most miraculous circular dance at the bottom of the cauldron. This can't be seen except from close by. I've no power to make it come up, because this circular dance has to be done at the bottom of the cauldron."

The king stood up and strode down the steps to stand by the cauldron, regardless of the heat, bending forward to watch. The water was smooth as a mirror, and the head was lying there looking up, its two eyes fixed on the king. When the king's eyes lighted on its face, it gave a charming smile. This smile made the king feel they had met before, but he could not for the moment recall who this was. As he was wondering, the dark man drew the grey sword from his back, swept it forward like lightning from the nape of the king's neck, and the king's head fell with a splash into the cauldron.

When enemies meet, they know each other at a glance, particularly at close quarters. As soon as the king's head touched the water, Mei Chien Chih's head came up to meet it, and took a bite out of its ear. At once the water in the cauldron boiled, bubbling furiously; and the two heads started a fight to the death in the water. After about twenty encounters, the king's head was wounded in five places, and Mei Chien Chih's in seven. The crafty king contrived to slip up behind his enemy, and in an unguarded moment Mei Chien Chih let himself be caught at the back of his neck, so that he couldn't turn round. The king's head fastened its teeth into him and wouldn't let go, sinking its teeth deeper and deeper; and the child's cries of pain could be heard even outside the cauldron. Everybody from the queen down to the court jester, who had been petrified with fright before, was galvanized into life by this sound, and felt as sad as if the sun had been swallowed up in darkness. They were all over gooseflesh; but this was followed by a secret joy, as they stared round-eyed, as if in expectation of something.

The dark man seemed rather taken aback too but he did not change colour. Effortlessly he raised his arm like a withered branch holding

the invisible sword, and stretched forward as if to peer into the cauldron. His arm suddenly bent, the sword thrust down swiftly from behind, and his severed head fell into the cauldron with a plop, sending snow white foam flying in all directions.

As soon as his head hit the water, it charged straight at the king's head, and took his nose between its teeth, practically biting it off. The king let out a cry of pain, and as he opened his mouth Mei Chien Chih's head managed to get away, whirling round to get a vice-like grip on his jaw. They not only held on tight, but pulled with all their might in opposite directions, tugging so that the king's head couldn't keep its mouth shut any more. Then they began biting at him furiously like famished hens pecking at rice, till the king's head was completely mauled, and bitten out of recognition. To begin with he could still roll frantically about in the cauldron, later he just lay there groaning, and finally he fell silent, at his last gasp.

The heads of the dark man and Mei Chien Chih gradually stopped biting, left the king's head and swam once round the edge of the cauldron, to see whether he was shamming or whether he was really dead. When they found that the king's head had really breathed its last, they exchanged glances and smiled, then closed their eyes, looked up at the sky, and sank to the bottom of the water.

IV

The fire went out, and the water stopped boiling. The extraordinary silence brought everybody in the court to their senses. Someone gave an exclamation, and at once they were all calling out in fright together. Then someone else walked over to the golden cauldron, and all the others pressed after him. Those crowded at the back could only peer between the necks of those in front.

The heat still scorched their faces. But the water in the cauldron was as smooth as a mirror, with a coating of oil on top, which reflected all their faces. the queen, concubines, guards, old ministers, dwarfs, eunuchs. . . .

"Heavens! Our great king's head is still in there! Oh dear, oh dear!" The sixth concubine burst into wild sobs.

Consternation seized them all, from the queen down to the court jester. They scattered in panic, at a complete loss, running round and round in circles. The wisest old councillor went forward alone, stretched out his hand to touch the side of the cauldron, then trembled all over, drew back his hand at once, and put two fingers to his mouth to blow on them again and again.

Pulling themselves together, they gathered outside the door to discuss how to fish the head out. They consulted together the time it would take to cook three pans of millet, and finally reached a conclusion: that

was, to collect the wire scoops from the big kitchen, and order the guards to do their best to fish it out.

Soon the implements were ready: wire scoops, strainers, golden dishes and dusters were all placed by the cauldron. Then the guards rolled up their sleeves, some of them using the wire scoops, some the strainers, and set respectfully about fishing up the head. The scoops could be heard striking against each other and scraping the edge of the cauldron, while the water eddied about in their wake. After some time, one of the guards' faces grew suddenly grave, as he very carefully raised his scoop slowly in both hands. Drops of water like pearls dripped from the scoop, in which could be seen a snow white skull. All cried out with astonishment, and he deposited the skull on one golden dish.

"Oh dear! Our king!" The queen, concubines, ministers and even the eunuchs burst out sobbing. Presently, however, they stopped, because the guard had fished out another skull just like the first.

They looked dully round with tear-filled eyes, and saw the perspiring guards were still fishing. They fished out a tangled mass of white hair and black hair, and several spoonfuls of some very short hairs which looked like white beards and black beards. Then another skull. Then three hairpins.

They stopped only when nothing but clear soup was left in the cauldron. And they divided what they had salvaged onto three golden dishes; one dish of skulls, one dish of hair, one dish of hairpins.

"Our king only had one head. Which is the king's head?" demanded the ninth concubine frantically.

"Quite so. . . ." The ministers looked at each other in dismay.

"If the skin and flesh hadn't boiled away, it would be easy to tell," said one kneeling dwarf.

They forced themselves to examine the skulls dispassionately, but the size and colour were about the same, so that they couldn't even tell which was the boy's head. The queen said the king had a scar on his right temple as the result of a fall he had had when he was prince, and it might have left a trace on the skull. Sure enough, the dwarfs discovered such a mark on one of the skulls, and there was general rejoicing, until another dwarf discovered a similar mark on the right temple of a slightly yellower skull.

"I know!" exclaimed the third concubine happily. "Our king had a very high nose."

The eunuchs hastened to examine the noses, and found one of them was certainly relatively high, although there really wasn't much to choose between them; but the worst of it was that particular skull had no mark on the right temple.

"Besides," said the ministers to the eunuchs, "could the back of our king's skull have been so pointed?"

"We never paid any attention to the back of His Majesty's head. . . ."

The queen and the concubines started thinking back too; some said it was pointed, and some flat. When they called the eunuch who combed the royal hair, and questioned him, he wouldn't say anything.

That evening they held a meeting of princes and ministers to decide which head was the king's, but with no better result than during the day. In fact, even the hair and beards presented a problem. The white was of course the king's; but since his hair was grizzled, it was very difficult to decide about the black. They discussed for half the night, and had just set aside a few red hairs when the ninth concubine protested, because she was sure she had seen a few yellow hairs in the king's beard; in which case how could they be sure there was not a single red one? So they had to put them all together again, and leave the case unsettled.

They had still got nowhere by the early hours of the morning. They prolonged the discussion amid yawns till the cock crowed, before they fixed on a really safe and satisfactory solution. That was that all three heads should be placed in the golden coffin beside the king's body for burial.

The funeral took place a week later, and the whole city was agog. Citizens of the capital and people from far away flocked to watch the royal funeral. As soon as it was light, the road was packed with men and women; and sandwiched in between were tables with sacrificial offerings. In the middle of the morning horsemen cantered out to clear the roads. Some time later came a procession of flags, batons, spears, bows, halberds and the like, followed by four cartloads of musicians. Then, rising and falling with the irregularities of the ground, came a yellow canopy which drew gradually nearer, till it was possible to make out the hearse with the golden coffin, in which lay three heads and one body.

As the people knelt down, the rows of tables of offerings stood out among the crowd. Some loyal subjects were very indignant, and swallowed tears to think that the spirits of those two regicides must be enjoying the sacrifice now together with the king; but there was nothing they could do about it.

Then followed the carriages of the queen and concubines. The people looked at them, and they looked at the people, without stopping their wailing. After them came the ministers, eunuchs and dwarfs, all of whom had assumed a mournful air. But the people paid no attention to them, and their procession was already squeezed out of all semblance of order.

Oct. 1926

Hurricane

by Chou Li-po

"Hurricane" is a novel about land reform in China. It depicts various types of peasants and landlords, and exposes the cruelty, craftiness and hypocrisy of the feudal landlords, at the same time describing the courage, industry and intelligence of the Chinese peasants. After the peasants of Yuanmao Village in Sungchiang Province, Northeast China, were liberated in 1946, a work team organized by the Northeast People's Government led them to overthrow the feudal power in their village. This novel is an account of the tortuous and complex course of this great struggle. The first part describes how the peasants of Yuanmao overthrow the local despot, Landlord Han. Chapters Seven to Seventeen are given in this translation. The leading characters of the novel are Team Leader Hsiao, a communist who heads the work team, and Chao, a poor tenant who is admitted to the Party.

In 1951, "Hurricane" was awarded a Stalin Prize.

VII

The night when the peasant Chao was leading a group of men to arrest Landlord Han, many people in Yuanmao slept badly. The lights in the mansion and the schoolhouse were burning throughout the night, and the atmosphere was tense in both places. Both camps were putting all their strength into the struggle, keyed up for all eventualities. But it was a desperate, hopeless fight for the one side and confident revolutionary action for the other.

As Chao and his men headed for Han's house, they met two men coming toward them, their figures silhouetted against the dim starlight. In another minute they recognized Han and his bodyguard, Li. The suddenness of it all startled Chao—he was speechless and instinctively hid the rope he was carrying behind his back. The bald head looming up before him was the terrible landlord, Han, whom the country folk had never dared look in the face. "How can I seize him?" wondered Chao. Seeing his hesitation, Landlord Han adopted his usual high and mighty tone: "Old Chao, I'm told you want to put me under arrest. Well, here I am!"

Seeing Han in a towering rage, some of the men began to take to their heels. Old Tien dared not advance, and Carter Sun retreated step by step to make his way slowly home. Only the youngsters stood by Chao.

"Why don't you speak up?" demanded Landlord Han, taking a step forward. "What's that rope for—there behind your back? Do you want to arrest me? Who gives you the authority? What have I done to be arrested? If you want to arrest a man, you must give the reason. I have a few *mou*¹ of land and a few rooms inherited from my ancestors, and I haven't stolen anything nor robbed anybody. What harm have I done you that you should bring a rope to seize me? Come on. Let's go together to see the political workers and talk it over with them."

Seeing Chao intimidated by Landlord Han, Squad Leader Chang came to his rescue. "We have talked it over," he said. "Everybody knows how many crimes you've committed."

"Don't you remember making me kneel on the broken bowls?" Chao plucked up courage again. The fact that Chao dared speak out took Landlord Han aback to begin with. However, he immediately denied the charge and tried to soft-soap him, saying: "Brother Chao, you've got it wrong. Why! I never did such a thing."

Enraged, Chao answered furiously:

"Can your lie alter the fact? I won't argue with you here. Let's go and see Team Leader Hsiao." The rope appeared again just as suddenly as it had disappeared.

"Very well, let's go." Landlord Han trembled inwardly at Chao's unexpected firmness, but he tried to put a bold face on it. "Even Team Leader Hsiao'll have to talk reason. Black and white can't be confused. I've a clear record, and nobody can libel me. Brother Chao, who can wrong an upright man?"

"Who's your brother Chao? Don't 'brother' me."

"We're brothers, aren't we? We live in the same village and meet every day. Perhaps, in spite of myself, I may have spoken sharply to you once or twice during the past or failed to take good care of you. I admit it, but then that's a family affair. Why should you wash dirty linen in public and make a fool of yourself? The proverb says: 'A near neighbour is dearer than a distant relative.'"

"Come on," interposed Squad Leader Chang. "Stop gabbing."

"Let's move on," said Chao. "It's too late now for you to argue. When the Japanese were here, you forced me to kneel on broken bowls in pools of my own blood. 'Sir,' I begged, 'I can't bear the pain. Let me off—I'm your neighbour.' And have you forgotten what you said then? You said: 'Who's your neighbour, you bastard!' Now you quote the proverb at me. You sent me to forced labour before it was my turn, and when I came back my daughter was dead. Yet you call yourself my good

¹About 1/6 of an acre

neighbour!" Remembering with bitterness the days when he hadn't even trousers to wear, and how his little girl had died, Chao grew angry.

"Get going. It's a waste of breath reasoning with you. Get a move on!"

"All right, I'm going! What do I fear? You may accuse me, but I'm not guilty. 'A straight foot is not afraid of a crooked shoe.' I'll go with you."

"Have you never done any wrong?" demanded Chao. "The first time the bandits came, you burned joss-sticks for three days and three nights to welcome them. The second time, you let them in through the west gate to raid the village. When they left, you hadn't lost so much as a straw. Aren't you hand in glove with the bandit chiefs? Besides, let me ask you, where has your younger brother gone to?"

"When the bandits came, didn't I fire at them too?" protested Han weakly, but evaded the question about his brother. He felt thoroughly nervous, but tried to keep calm.

"You fired at the bandits, indeed! You were firing a salute. Everybody knew you were firing into the sky." Chao called his bluff.

"Where's your gun?" asked Squad Leader Chang, hearing that the landlord had one.

"I surrendered it to the government office at Yimienpo."

"Is that true?" Squad Leader Chang asked Chao.

"Who knows?"

"Let's move on. If you want to go, let's get going," urged Han, thereby warding off questions as to the gun. "You go home," he turned to Bodyguard Li, "and tell them that I'm paying a visit to the work team, that it's all right. Tell the women to be careful while I'm away." When Li had gone, Han again urged the group to hurry. "Let's move on," he said. "I want to see Team Leader Hsiao and ask him to explain why Chao should come in the dead of night to arrest me, for no reason at all. What law allows this? You're trumping up a charge against an innocent man, that's what you're doing!"

"All right, come and accuse me," answered Chao walking the landlord off.

After they arrived at the schoolhouse, some of the villagers went home. Political worker Little Wang pulled Chao to the window and asked him what had happened. The latter told him that they had met Han halfway and had an argument with him. When the peasant quoted the landlord as saying: "'A straight foot is not afraid of a crooked shoe,'" the political worker broke into a guffaw and quoted a quip: "'The uglier a woman is, the more flowers she wants to wear in her hair.'"

Team Leader Hsiao shook Chao's hand and listened to his report. Then he told him to go home and rest. He also enjoined him to try to rally more young men, more farmhands, more poor men, the more the better. A mass meeting was to take place sooner or later, and the masses must be mobilized beforehand. "All right, you go back now," he said

finally. The peasant returned the automatic to Little Wang and was starting to go, when Team Leader Hsiao remembered something and called him to wait:

"Just a minute, Old Chao," and he turned to Squad Leader Chang: "Let Chao use one of our rifles."

Squad Leader Chang handed him a rifle with three belts of cartridges, and Team Leader Hsiao added:

"You must be on the alert, Old Chao."

Landlord Han had bowed politely to Team Leader Hsiao when he first entered the room, but the latter had given him the cold shoulder and turned to talk with Chao. Old Wan, the messenger, had said: "You wait over there." And he had taken him to a corner of the room. But Han had cocked his ears to eavesdrop.

Directly Chao had left, he stepped up to the team leader and made a low bow once more, his face wreathed in smiles.

The team leader looked him up and down. The landlord was half bald, with a waxen face and blackened teeth that showed when he smiled. He was wearing a white silk jacket, black flower-patterned trousers, and leather shoes. So this was the man who had supplied the Kuomintang bandits with information, horses, guns, and provisions. His younger brother was still a bandit chief in Taching Mountain. Team Leader Hsiao had heard a lot about this man before coming to this village, and since his arrival he had heard much more.

"So you are the worthy Mr. Han," said Team Leader Hsiao sarcastically.

"My name is Han," answered the landlord with another bow. "I was sorry you could not honour me with your company, and I have been wanting to pay you a visit."

"It's not too late now," said Hsiao. The landlord took out a packet of cigarettes and offered one to the team leader, who refused. Han lighted and smoked it himself.

"You wouldn't have come to this poor, wild, out-of-the-way place but for our sake. It's too shabby and inconvenient here, you don't even have enough stools to go round. If you care to move into my house tomorrow, you're welcome. I shall vacate the north wing, and you may have your office in there. Besides, we country folk are so ignorant of things in the present democratic world, I hope to benefit by your advanced knowledge."

"Tomorrow's affairs we'll decide tomorrow. For tonight, you stay here."

"How now? Surely you don't mean it—are you taking me into custody?" He was flustered, but made himself appear calm. He had not expected that Chao could have turned against him and that Team Leader Hsiao should have put him under arrest. With his relatives and sworn brothers in this village watching over his welfare, his friends and supporters in Harbin, Chiamussu and Yimienpo, and his younger brother in Taching Mountain, all protecting him from afar, he had thought he was

as safe as a rock. Who would dare lift a finger against him? Now events had taken him by surprise. Was he really a prisoner already?

"May I go home now and come back presently, Team Leader Hsiao?"

"No," was the laconic reply.

"Team Leader Hsiao, you may think there's no need, but I say it's necessary. If you won't allow me to go, you must give me the reason." There was a hypocritical smile on his sallow face

"It's no, and that's all," thundered Little Wang, bringing his right palm down on the desk. "Who cares to reason with a traitor landlord?"

"Young comrade, you shouldn't be so ready to call a fellow names," Han protested.

"Indeed! I'm going to slap your face too," said Little Wang.

"Young comrade, the Eighth Route Army and the Communists never curse people!" said Han, and thought complacently: "I've licked him now."

"The Eighth Route Army and the Communists never curse good people, that's true," replied Team Leader Hsiao slowly yet firmly. "But in dealing with bad eggs—well, I'm not so sure." Just then Han's wife and concubine burst in, wailing. Mrs Han was beating her breast, squalling, while the concubine was whimpering.

"What crime has our man committed that you keep him here?" piped the wife. "You go ahead and kill me, kill all of us, why don't you!"

"Team Leader," chimed in the concubine, pulling out a pink handkerchief and dabbing her nose with it, "if you put our man under arrest, isn't that contrary to your good policy?"

These two women were soon reinforced by a whole gang—Han's daughters-in-law, his nephews' wives and nieces' husbands, his nephews and nieces all trooped into the room. His daughter Aicheng brought up the rear. She was dressed to kill, her pink underwear showing through her white silk jacket. Going up to Landlord Han, she leaned on his shoulder and whimpered:

"Papa, they're wronging you!"

To add to this pandemonium, in barged the other two big landlords of the village, Tu and Tang, at the head of at least thirty men. They swarmed in, and clustered around the political workers. Tu bowed to Team Leader Hsiao just as Landlord Han had done, except that, being fat and pot-bellied, he could not bend so low. Then Landlord Tang stepped forward and presented Hsiao with a piece of paper which had on it these words:

"To Team Leader Hsiao Mr. Han has been taken into custody by your work team. He must have been falsely accused by some one who bears him a grudge. As he is a very, very good citizen, we beg you to be good enough to release him at once. We, the undersigned, are willing to go bail for him."

There followed the names, fingerprints or seals of thirty-two people,



HSU PEI-HUNG First Flirt into the World

Han's nephew, Long-neck Han, took advantage of all the noise and confusion to slip up to Han, and confer with him in a whisper. They had just finished when Landlord Tu wheezed:

"Please let him go, Team Leader."

"We'll bail for him," added Landlord Tang with a long sigh.

The wailing of the women and pestering of the men did not flurry Team Leader Hsiao in the least. Sitting calmly on the desk watching the melodramatic scene being staged by these actors and actresses, he could not help being amused. When the petition was handed to him he read it slowly, and when he came to "As he is a very, very good citizen," he burst out laughing and asked Landlord Tang who stood at the head of the group:

"Han was head of this village for two years during the 'Manchukuo' puppet regime. His elder brother was a spy for the Japanese in five counties, and his younger brother is still a Kuomintang bandit chief. Han's nickname is Big Stick; he went through all the neighbouring villages beating people up. He used a hundred wiles to ruin decent women. He seized the better farms. Now in this petition here you say he is a very, very good citizen. Well, I would like to ask—what country is he a very, very good citizen of? Eh?"

Everybody was dumb. Surprised to find his biography so well known to the leader of the team, Han said to Tu and Tang.

"Thank you for your kind offer to bail me out. That's not necessary now. Team Leader Hsiao is only keeping me here for a talk. I'm all right. You'd better go home." He turned to his wife. "Go home. Don't worry. Team Leader Hsiao'll let me go home soon." To his concubine: "Send me a packet of cigarettes, and supper with wine."

Han's family and the men who had offered to put up bail for him cleared out. Soon after, Bodyguard Li brought in an enamel food container painted with green twigs and leaves, and a decanter of white wine. He placed the food and wine on a desk near his master. Han invited Team Leader Hsiao to join him, but the latter declined. Then he invited Liu Sheng and Little Wang, saying:

"Just taste our local cooking, comrades—roe-buck venison and kaoliang wine."

tillery *Fortune and Virtue*. "Poor men's pain is rich men's gain" was his tenet. His hands were red with the blood of tenants and farmhands. He knew he had many enemies, but he believed the "Manchukuo" regime would last thousands of years, strong as an "iron barrel" behind which he was well protected and invulnerable. Who could have thought that on August 15, 1945, guns would roar out, and within ten days the "iron barrel" would be pricked like a bubble! Some of the Japanese died, and some fled, abandoning Han like a homeless waif. For a time he was in a panic and considered himself finished. Luckily the "Central Vanguard" of Chiang Kai-shek arrived under the command of Liu 'Tso-fei who incorporated the forces of Han's brothers and, through them, appointed Han interim head of the village. He was in the swim again and went about with private armed guards. As soon as Liu came to the village, he ordered all the landlords to burn joss-sticks for three days and nights in welcome. The money squeezed from the villagers in taxes he spent like water. However, within a fortnight, the 3rd Battalion of the 359th Brigade of the Eighth Route Army came and the "Central Vanguard" vanished overnight. Han stowed away his guns. Now this little work team had come to Yuanmao, and looked as if it was going to turn the whole village upside down. Even Chao, whom he usually considered beneath his notice, had dared to bring men to lay hands on him! This was something which his father and father's fathers could never have dreamt of. Was he having a nightmare from overeating? No. Here he was, obviously, under arrest with no idea what was going to happen tomorrow! He went cold, gripped by a strange and terrible fear!

"This state of affairs won't last long." This thought flashed across his mind and gave him temporary relief. "How can a pack of poor men stay in power?" This was what he told people, and what he believed. So he set himself to weather the storm, and wait for better days.

"When will that day come?" He suddenly flagged. He had received no news of his son who had joined the Kuomintang army. It looked as if the work team would be here for some time. Very well, let them see who was the stronger. He cast a furtive glance at Team Leader Hsiao sitting there and he felt quite angry. He recalled his nephew's whispered advice: "You must wait now, and see how he acts."

While Han was indulging in his reminiscences, Team Leader Hsiao told Little Wang and two other men to keep watch over the main road. Except for two or three men to be left as sentries about the school campus, all the other guards were to go out and arrange a mass meeting of the more enthusiastic villagers for the next day. The peasants should be encouraged beforehand to air their grievances against their oppressors.

One by one the men went out. It was getting late—the stars were high in the sky. Dogs were barking at both ends of the village. Outside the courtyards before many sprawling huts, dark shadowy figures were lurking.

With his automatic strapped to his waist, Team Leader Hsiao was off to see what was going on in the Han mansion since the landlord's arrest. The years he had spent as a guerilla had made him fearless; he had not allowed Wan to accompany him. As he was skirting a tumble-down hut with doors and windows fallen apart, he saw a shadow fleeing along the wall. "Who goes there?" he shouted. Scarcely had his voice rung out when—bang! A bullet whistled in his direction, whipping up the dust at his feet. With a bound he took cover behind a tree and fired a round at the corner of the hut.

"Who was that? Are you hurt?" called out Little Wang, who had heard the shot and run up, his finger on the trigger of his automatic.

"I'm all right," answered Hsiao, replacing his gun.

"Where did it come from?" Liu Sheng also had dashed up panting.

"Let's give chase," suggested Wan. Squad Leader Chang had also appeared with some men from another direction. They all wanted to go and search around the hut.

"Let it go," said Team Leader Hsiao. "We're not familiar with the terrain around here, and the masses haven't been mobilized sufficiently. If we act on the spur of the moment, we may get into trouble. The incident tonight is a warning to us. We must all be more careful in future." He turned to Squad Leader Chang: "See to it that the sentries keep their eyes open tonight."

Meanwhile the hidden gunman had run into a willow grove and escaped north along a zigzag path. When he had run some way and heard no pursuing footsteps, he halted, wiped the beads of sweat from his long neck with his sleeves, and strapped his revolver to his waistband. It was dawn when he reached home.

VIII

These days, all the villagers were in the grip of a strange sensation. Behind window panes, through cracks of paper windows, amid Indian corn and kaoliang plants, under willows, behind gourd trellises, on eaves, they were dying to know what the political workers were going to do. With wide-opened eyes and pricked-up ears they were watching every way the cat was to jump. Each was busy thinking how to adjust himself to the new order of things, and his calculations were based upon his social status, property, disposition, attitude and character. Some were happy, some sorry, some suspicious, some inwardly worried, some outwardly jovial. But none were unconcerned or could be put off.

Scarcely had the sun risen above the Jiang hills when a greyish smoke begun curling up from the chimneys of the households of the village, when rumours started to go round from mouth

of the village to the other, like big black crows flapping their wings, hovering over housetops and shrieking:

"The political workers hobnobbed with Landlord Han last night."

"Who told you?"

"Li Chen-chiang saw them with his own eyes. He heard Team Leader Hsiao say: 'We're strangers here, so we need your help,' and Landlord Han answered: 'Certainly, I'm at your service.'"

"Where was the shooting last night?"

"Yes, bang! eleven shots! I thought it was bandits raiding again."

"There, you see! I heard it was Han's younger brother coming back from Taching Mountain to rescue him."

"I heard too that Bandit Han fired a round at the work team and shouted: 'Let my brother go!' When they didn't answer, he fired a second round. Presently Han himself appeared at the door waving his hand at his brother, saying: 'Don't fire! Team Leader Hsiao and I have agreed to co-operate from now on. All's well, so you'd better go back.' Then Bandit Han apologized to Team Leader Hsiao, saying: 'I'm sorry for this mistake,' and rode back to the mountain the same night."

Rumours multiplied and became more sensational as they passed from mouth to mouth. Some even said: "Team Leader Hsiao and Landlord Han have kowtowed to each other and become sworn brothers." Others said: "Landlord Han is organizing a grand reception and burning joss-sticks again, this time in honour of the political workers."

After breakfast, Carter Sun started sounding the brass gong again from one end of the village to the other and crying at the top of his voice:

"Come to the mass meeting at the schoolhouse! A meeting to accuse Landlord Han."

Chao was one of the first to arrive. He stepped into the classroom, slung the rifle off his shoulder, and leaned it against the wall.

Liu Sheng buttonholed Chao to help set the stage for the accusation meeting. In the middle of the playground they rigged up a temporary platform out of six desks and twelve planks. On the trunks of two poplars by the platform they stuck up two slogans on white paper that Liu Sheng had written. One slogan read: "Peasants of Yuanmao Meet to Settle Scores!" The other: "Down with the Local Despot, Landlord Han!"

Villagers began to stream in, all in straw hats, some stripped to the waist. Some stopped before the platform to watch Liu Sheng setting a desk and a few chairs in place. A big crowd clustered around a man who was telling a story about a bear pulling up Indian corn: "He plucked two ears of corn and stuck them under his left armpit. When he put out his paws to pick another two, the two he already had dropped to the ground. So he kept getting two ears of corn and losing them at the same time. After a whole evening's work, he plodded off with two ears of corn stuck under his armpit, no more and no less." The listeners were greatly amused. The story teller, of course, was Carter Sun.

There was Old Tien in a tattered straw hat, squatting beside a wall, apparently avoiding conversation with anybody. A group of children was perched on the window-sills outside the classroom, peering through the glass panes at Landlord Han.

Nobody made any reference to the struggle against Landlord Han, but they were all in suspense, waiting eagerly for the meeting to come to order.

Han's family members, his kith and kin, grown-ups and children, sworn brothers and small-fry gangsters had come in force and filtered into the audience. Though they said nothing, everybody knew and feared them, and in their presence the villagers did their best to hide their interest in this meeting. Li Chen-chiang squatted down beside Old Tien and engaged him in conversation.

"How about your beans?" he asked.

"Finished. The weeds are taller than the plants. The field is still under water," the old man answered dejectedly.

"And the Indian corn?"

"Worse!" As he answered, he demonstrated with his hand. "The plants are no taller than this. A sow can eat them without lifting her forelegs." He was on the point of saying: "My land was ruined by the bandits," but he stopped short, remembering Li Chen-chiang was Landlord Han's henchman, and a relative of Han's bodyguard Li, who was an agent of the bandits. So he swallowed his remark and heaved a sigh.

"Never mind, Old Tien," said Li Chen-chiang softly, with a quick glance round. "Don't you worry. Landlord Han says he won't ask you for any rent this year, and if you're short of grain now, you can go to his house for a few pecks. It's all right." Having said this he got up and disappeared into the crowd, where he tried to win sympathizers for the landlord.

Long-neck Han was moving about too, whispering to this man and patting that man on the shoulder, a crafty smile on his face.

Liu Sheng mounted the platform with a leap, and the gathering drew closer below. All turned and looked at the doorway through which Chao was bringing out Han. The landlord was not bound. They told him to go onto the platform. Team Leader Hsiao had followed him out. He glanced at the audience, and sensed the lukewarm atmosphere. As he walked through the crowd he noticed Li Chen-chiang scurrying about, and told Wan to give him a warning. "If he goes on speaking round and chuck him out."

Seeing Team Leader Hsiao, Long-neck Han quickly disappeared into the thick of the crowd and kept quiet. The team leader saw him but did not know who he was. The villagers all knew him to be Han's favorite dog, but dared not inform against him.

Once on the platform, Landlord Han took in the situation at a glance. Down there in the arena were his family, relatives and friends. His nephew and Li Chen-chiang were there too. The man who had just

contracted into a faint smile. He took out a packet of cigarettes, offered one to Liu Sheng and, after it was refused, lighted and smoked it himself. As he puffed, he deliberately made some commonplace remarks to Liu. When the latter sat down to rest his legs, Han sat down immediately in another chair beside him. He continued to emit ring after ring of bluish smoke, looking quite unruffled.

The audience rippled with whispers.

"See! He's sitting side by side with the political worker!"

"Then it must be true that Team Leader Hsiao clinked glasses with him last night." Seven or eight hundred people had come, but now some of them started leaving. Team Leader Hsiao told Wan to go up and tell Liu Sheng not to sit together with Han, but to declare the meeting open at once. Liu Sheng stepped to the front of the platform and announced:

"Landlord Han is Public Enemy Number One of Yuanmao. Our work team has heard many villagers accuse Han of oppressing and exploiting the people. So last night he was brought here, and now we shall reason with him, and settle accounts with him." After these brief remarks, he concluded: "Those of you who have been wronged can take revenge, those of you with grievances can speak out. Don't be afraid."

Li Chen-chiang spoke up from the crowd:

"That's right, don't be afraid!"

However, everybody kept silent. Little Wang looked at Chao as much as to say: "Why don't you fire the first shot?"

Chao pushed his way to the front. The sight of Landlord Han sitting there completely at his ease made him angry. He unbuttoned his jacket, because the idea of speaking in public had made him break into a sweat. He pointed a finger at Han and boomed:

"You traitor! You exploited and oppressed us more cruelly than the Japanese devils. In 1937, backed by that Japanese bastard Tamori Taro, you conscripted me for forced labour before my turn. When I got back, my land had gone to seed, my daughter had died, and my wife and little boy had gone begging. The crop had failed, yet you insisted upon my paying you the rent. When I said I had nothing to give, you made me kneel on broken bowls till my blood spilled over the ground. Do you remember that? Folks!" He turned to address the audience: "Shall I get even with him, this old traitor?"

"Go ahead," responded several dozen men, among whom were a dozen youngsters. Standing near the platform, they could see the scars on Chao's knees; they felt sorry for him and indignant. Mixed with the response was the hoarse voice of Old Tien.

"I've finished," said Chao. "Those who have grievances, speak up!"

There was a stir among the audience. Han's coterie were eyeing and marking their neighbours, but no one paid any attention to them.

"Who else wants to speak?" asked Liu from the platform.

After a few men had accused the landlord, a young fellow stepped forward from the right corner. He was wearing a tattered straw hat and

a vest which had been patched and repatched with rags of every colour and shape—red, grey, black and checkered, till you could hardly tell what cloth the original vest was made of. This young man in the colourful vest stepped forward and said:

"Han, you relied on Japanese backing to have us poor folk savagely beaten. You treated us like dirt, you were crueller than the Japanese devils! In 1938 you hired me as a farmhand. At the end of the year I asked for my wages, but you refused to pay me. When I asked why, you said, 'Because that's what I choose!' And the next day you told the Japanese clerk Miya to conscript me for forced labour. Now what have you got to say?"

"Down with big landlords! Down with traitors!" shouted Little Wang. These slogans were echoed by many, and a ripple of excitement ran through the crowd. Some cried: "Give him a thrashing!" However, Han was on the platform, and the platform was high; no one went up. To begin with, Landlord Han had been sitting there with his legs crossed, cigarette in mouth, motionless with a poker-face, except that because he had been many hours without opium he kept giving great yawns. Now Chao's indictment supported by Little Wang's slogans made him change colour and turn pale. He fidgetted, and dared not remain seated, growing more and more restless.

A man with a white beard, standing beside Long-neck Han, rolled up his sleeves and elbowed his way to the front, muttering:

"I should like a hearing too."

All eyes were turned on him. This was White Goatee, who had thrown a monkey-wrench into the proceedings of the last mass meeting. Now he too pointed an accusing finger at Han and piped:

"During the puppet 'Manchukuo' time you lorded it over us. In 1938 I tethered a mare in your stable, and she kicked up a rumpus with a stallion of yours. Then you rushed out and, without finding out which was in the right, just laid into my mare with your whip. 'It was your horse that started,' I said. 'You're whipping the wrong horse.' You said: 'Your mare had no business in my stable. Rape your mother.' Now I ask you, why should you want to rape my mother?" How would you like it if I said: 'I'll rape your mother'?"

"You're welcome," answered Han, whose mother had died ten years ago. The crowd laughed, and this lessened the tension between the two opposing camps, for many people relaxed. A little colour came back to Landlord Han's face and he started smoking again. White Goatee went on:

"I ask you, Landlord Han, you've offended so many people, what are you going to do about it?"

"I'll do whatever you all say," answered Han, puffing at his cigarette.

"Say yourself," White Goatee prompted, pretending to be a lawyer.

"If you ask me, my younger brother is to blame for what my neighbours have been referring to. But if I know I've done a wrong, I'll certainly put it right."

"Where is your younger brother then?" asked White Goatee, to divert the villagers' attention from Han.

"He's up in Taching Mountain. If you good folk can get him back you'll be ridding our family too of a great menace. You can beat him, or shoot him, or send him to jail just as you please. I shall be only too grateful."

"Don't just talk about your bandit brother. Let's hear more about yourself," shouted Chao.

"What have I done wrong? Point out my mistakes, if any, and I'll take punishment. I've a few *mou* of land more than most, but even before the work team arrived I'd thought of offering it to you all."

"How many *mou* are you willing to offer us?" White Goatee prompted.

"By the sweat of their brow my ancestors accumulated about seven hundred *mou* of land. I'm willing to part with five hundred *mou*. That is, if you good folk allow me to keep the remaining two hundred *mou*, considering that I've ten mouths to feed. We belong to the same village. I'm sure you don't want my family to starve to death."

Seeing that the once ferocious landlord had offered his land voluntarily, the villagers were in a melting mood. The weather was fine, and they had a lot to do in the fields. Han's family and sympathizers seized this psychological moment to come to his defence. They started speaking up for him among the crowd.

"Yes, the trouble with him is he has a few *mou* too many. Otherwise he's all right," said one of his sworn brothers.

"It was force of circumstance that made him act as village head during the puppet regime; you can't blame him for that," another sympathizer observed.

"He's promised to behave better in future, so why not let it go at that?" another moralized.

"Five hundred *mou* to be distributed—that's good, but what about his horses? He has a lot; let him part with a few."

Hearing this, Han promptly offered:

"Very well then, I'll surrender five of them."

"See, he's even offering livestock!" exclaimed one of his relatives.

"The villagers haven't enough clothing, and you've plenty; why don't you offer some clothes as well, to round things off?" White Goatee suggested.

"All right, what you say goes. I'll give my black silk cotton-padded coat, a pair of black cloth trousers, and my wife's blue gown."

"Team Leader," White Goatee went up to Hsiao, clasping his hands in salute. "Han has offered land, horses, and clothes; it can't be easy

for him. Won't you release him and leave him to us? If he does anything wrong again, you can easily bring him to book any time. What do you say, Team Leader?"

Team Leader Hsiao said nothing. White Goatee had made his character sufficiently known to him. Some poor men began to leave the meeting, dissatisfied. Some saw through Han's tricks, but dared not call his bluff. Other honest souls were taken in by his offer of land, horses and clothes, and were ready to forgive him. Carter Sun had gone. Old Tien was still sitting beside the wall, his head bent, silent. Middle Peasant Liu edged up to Long-neck Han and said with a grin:

"Yes, who can deny it was force of circumstance that made Han become village head? We know he was smart even under the puppet regime"

Chao went up to Little Wang and said: "My hands are itching to get at him!"

"Him—who?" asked Little Wang.

"That old fool, White Goatee. He's Han's sworn brother."

Chao said no more but walked off and squatted against the wall, standing the rifle between his knees.

It was already noon. Team Leader Hsiao said to Old Wan: "Go up and tell Liu Sheng to close the meeting first, and then consider the next step to be taken." And he ordered Landlord Han released.

Han got off the platform and stalked out with his wife, concubine and the whole gang in tow. Little Wang was furious and protested to Team Leader Hsiao, his neck swelling with indignation:

"Why must you let him go?"

"Well, I couldn't help it, could I?" Hsiao answered. Seeing how angry his assistant was, he meant to explain it to him in detail, but just then he saw Old Tien making off, and hurried over to talk with him for a while. As the old man was leaving, the team leader said:

"I'll pay you a visit later."

After people had left, the playground looked forlorn with just an empty platform in the middle.

Later that afternoon Bodyguard Li brought to the schoolhouse five horses and three pieces of clothing, and said:

"The five hundred *mu* of land offered by Landlord Han all lie outside the south and west gates—they may be divided up and made over at any time"

The next morning Team Leader Hsiao called to see Old Tien, but found him out. He saw a blind old woman sitting on the *lang*, who told him that her old man had gone to the fields. He came back to the schoolhouse and found Liu Sheng and Chao discussing how to distribute Han's horses and clothes. After much deliberation, the animals and clothes were sent to a few of the most needy families, but very soon they were all sent back. Carter Sun and three neighbours also declined a mare

"Why don't you want it? Don't you dare take it?" Team Leader Hsiao asked him.

"Of course I dare," lied the old carter. "But with a mare, I should have to scythe the grass and get up and feed her in the night. I'm too old to do all that. Besides, my legs are bad; I couldn't look after her."

The horses and clothes were left in the schoolhouse. Somebody suggested that they should be kept for the time being, but Hsiao said:

"What for? No, we'll send them back to Han."

When Chao had gone home, Liu Sheng immediately started to roll up his bedding, wrapping it in a Japanese army blanket and taking a rope to tie it with.

"What are you doing?" asked Hsiao.

"I'm quitting," he answered curtly, continuing to fumble with his bedding. He put a finger inside his glasses to wipe off—a bead of sweat or a tear?

"Where are you going to?"

"Back to Harbin. The thing has flopped again and again—it's more than I can stand. Why should I stay here to be frustrated? I didn't come to be frustrated, I came to do mass work."

Hsiao burst out laughing.

"What will you do in Harbin? If we can't do our work well in the country, how can we hold Harbin? If the city should fall, where will you go?"

"Farther eastward and still farther till I get to the east bank of River Usuri."

"You've got it all worked out," Team Leader Hsiao answered. He would have liked to say: "You certainly know how to look out for yourself," but he was afraid of hurting Liu's feelings too much. He had met a good many petty-bourgeois intellectuals like Liu Sheng who had joined the revolution. They often had the best intentions but could easily get impulsive and pessimistic. They could win victories but did not know how to take reverses. If anything did not go smoothly, they would be upset and depressed and develop a wrong tendency. He, therefore, advised Liu Sheng in a serious and yet soothing tone:

"No, Comrade. Your plan is entirely ill-considered. If you leave here to go to a safe place, do you mean you wouldn't care any more whether the people here should fall into the clutches of Chiang Kai-shek and the American imperialists, who would usher in another puppet regime? In mass work, just as in any other revolutionary work, the secret of success lies in the ability to stick it out and to wait. The masses aren't like so many wisps of dry straw—put a match to it and you can start a fire. How many days have we been here? A mere four days and nights. But the peasantry has been ground down and deceived by the landlords for thousands of years—for thousands of years, mind you!" Hsiao stopped short. He had a little weakness—he could easily be excited

by his own words. Now his voice was rather choked. He hurried to change the subject.

"Well, think it over carefully. If you must go back to Harbin, we can't keep you here. In Harbin, unless you don't go in for any work, you'll still come across difficulties. Where there's work, there's difficulty. What's revolutionary work but a ceaseless overcoming of difficulties?"

Liu Sheng said nothing, but he did not go on with his packing.

Hsiao suddenly realized that Little Wang was missing, and went out in search for him. Little Wang had slipped out, and sat down outside a shack to the east of the schoolhouse, leaning against a wheat rick. He was burning with anger against the masses, against White Goatee, against his leader too.

"Why he should have let go of Han is more than I can understand! He isn't going by the May 4th Directives of the Party. Is he compromising with the landlords?" When he saw Team Leader Hsiao coming, he quickly turned his head and looked the other way.

"What are you doing here?" Team Leader Hsiao sat down beside him.

"Team Leader!" Little Wang addressed Hsiao by his official title instead of calling him "Old Hsiao" or "Comrade Hsiao" as usual. "What I don't understand is why you let the man go free."

"Afraid of him," Hsiao chuckled.

"The way we manage things here, we're not only afraid of him, we're surrendering to him altogether," Little Wang fumed. "If you're going to go on this way, I'm leaving tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? Why not today? Liu Sheng's leaving today—why don't you go with him?" Team Leader Hsiao began jokingly, then stood up and continued in a serious tone: "I could easily have kept Han in custody—or even put a bullet through him. But the point is—have the masses risen up? They must act of their own accord. If we can't work patiently on the masses so that they take their destiny into their own hands and level the feudalistic strongholds to the ground, we can't overthrow feudalism. We can kill one Landlord Han, but there are other landlords."

"You let him go. Are you sure he won't escape?" Little Wang asked, looking up at Team Leader Hsiao.

"I think not, he's very pleased with himself. He hopes that we'll leave. Even if he were to run away, we could get him back sooner or later. Once the people are really aroused, no matter if he were a spirit riding on wind and fire, he couldn't slip through the net spread by the people."

Little Wang was satisfied with Team Leader Hsiao's words, which reflected his confidence in victory. At once his dissatisfaction with Hero vanished. He got to his feet and sauntered out with his leader along the road, skirting a willow grove. Team Leader Hsiao asked him.

"At the meeting today, did you notice a young man who spoke—he wore a vest patched in many different colours?"

"Chao told me his name is Kuo and he used to work in Han's house. He's working as hired hand now for Li Chen-chiang."

"Well, he strikes me as a proper peasant. Suppose you go and have a chat with him tomorrow."

When they got back to the schoolhouse, supper was ready.

IX

Little Wang and Chao went out to look for Kuo, and found him by Li's well, where he was watering a horse. His white teeth flashed in a smile as he hailed Chao. Barefoot and wearing his patched vest, he was drawing up a bucketful of water, and Little Wang went to help turn the handle of the pulley. After Chao had introduced them to each other, he said:

"You two have a chat. I've got some work to do."

Then he walked away. Kuo poured the water into a stone trough. Standing beside the stallion, and stroking its well-clipped greyish mane, he began chatting with Little Wang.

Just then there came a man leading a mare past the well, and the grey stallion neighed, broke loose, and made for the mare. Kuo ran after it, vaulted upon its slippery back, held its mane with both hands, and pressed its sides and belly with his legs. The animal jumped, kicked, and snorted, but Kuo stuck on its back till it tired, gave in, and walked back to the trough. He leaped down, replaced the halter, and started leading the horse back, saying to Little Wang:

"He's a bit wild, but he works hard and is young. He's full of strength. Look at his legs—smooth and straight as a bench. Time he was gelded."

They strolled back, commenting on the horse, and soon reached Li's house. It was spacious and clean, fenced in by a wooden palisade. The north wing consisted of five rooms; on its right were a mill and a barn, on its left a kitchen and a stable. After closing the horse in the stall, Kuo showed his guest into his room, a lean-to adjoining the stable. The small earthen *kang* was bare except for some loose litter straw and two tattered gunny-bags, which represented all his property.

"May I move over and live with you here?" Little Wang asked.

"You're welcome, if you don't mind living in this hole with me."

Later in the day, Little Wang brought along his baggage roll. From that day on he lived with Kuo, and they were together all the time, except for meals, which Little Wang had in the schoolhouse. Both young and with much in common, they soon became fast friends. On the farm and

in the vegetable garden Little Wang helped Kuo with mowing, crushing bean-cakes for fertilizer, feeding pigs, and doing odd jobs. Chatting together day and night, Little Wang came to learn a lot about Kuo.

Kuo was only twenty-four, but wrinkles were already visible around the corners of his eyes. From his birth up to twelve years, he had never had a pair of trousers on. His mother died when he was eight. His father hired himself out to Landlord Han as a farmhand when the boy was thirteen, and took him along as a stable hand. One New Year's Eve, when the landlord was playing cards, he called cheerfully to Old Kuo from his *kang*:

"Old Kuo, come on and make a hand. We're playing for small stakes."

"I can't play," the old peasant laughed, waving his hand politely. Han jumped off the *kang*, seized Old Kuo by the arm, and said with a scowl:

"If I condescend to ask you, how dare you refuse!"

"I meant no offence, sir. I really don't know how to play," Old Kuo muttered nervously, forcing a smile.

"Never mind. You won't lose, I can assure you. Because you're green at it, you'll be so much the luckier. Go in and win. Come on, Brother."

It was impossible for Old Kuo to refuse. At first all went well, and he even won a little. But having worked hard all day, he was tired out; and towards morning his head was swimming and he could hardly keep his eyes open. "I must drop out," he said and wanted to go.

"What!" Landlord Han glared at him. "Cash and carry? How clever! I tell you—no! Play on till dawn."

The old man played on in a daze, lost all he had won, and was rooked of a whole year's wages—the one hundred and ninety-five dollars and fifty cents he and his son had earned. He went back to his lean-to, angry and ashamed, and the next day he fell ill. He had to keep to his bed, panting, coughing, and groaning from the pain in his chest.

Han told his bodyguard Li:

"I don't understand why he should be ill on New Year's Day of all days. Tell him to leave off this groaning!"

Within a fortnight Old Kuo was in a bad way. One day, it was snowing hard, murky snow darkening the sky; the north wind howled, battering the huts of the poor. All but the most energetic youngsters kept indoors, warming themselves on the *lang* or by the wall stove, with all the doors and windows closed and frosted. This was a day to freeze off your nose and toes.

In a beaver cap, sitting close to the wall stove, warming his feet over a brass brazier, Han was entertaining Landlord Tu, his son's father-in-law, when Bodyguard Li ran in and said:

"Old Kuo is dying fast!"

"Carry him outdoors quickly," ordered Han. "Carry him outdoors, I say. Don't let him die inside."

"Don't let him die inside," chimed in Landlord Tu. "His foul breath might contaminate the whole household."

"Go quick and haul him out of his room, out of the house! Hurry up, you fool!" Han shouted. Li dashed out and, in turn, ordered a farmhand, named Chang, to carry Old Kuo out. Squatting on the *kang* behind the window, the landlord blew on the pane to melt the frost, and peered through the cleared circle at the courtyard outside. The snow was falling thick and fast and the wind howling more fiercely than ever. Han shouted at the top of his voice, rapping on the window:

"Hi, you! Why aren't you carrying him out yet?"

In the lean-to, Young Kuo was bending over his father, stroking his chest, when the dying man opened his eyes and muttered:

"It's all up with me, son." He wanted to say more, but his voice failed.

"Get out of the way!" shouted Li, pushing the boy aside. Then he and Chang placed a wide board across the end of the *kang*.

"What are you doing, Uncle Li?" the scared boy asked, wiping his eyes.

"Get on the *kang* and hoist him up by the shoulders," Li ordered the other man, ignoring the boy. In another minute, they were carrying out Old Kuo on the board, with the boy trailing behind and crying:

"Uncle Li, Pa will freeze to death outside. Don't carry him out, please."

"Go and beg Mr. Han," Li answered in a tone as icy as the snow which was pelting into the boy's face.

They laid Old Kuo down outside the compound gate, in the falling snow and tearing wind. Very soon he was frozen to death.

"Pa!" cried Young Kuo, still stroking his dead father's chest, his warm tears dropping down and sinking two holes in the piled-up snow. "Pa, you've died so wretchedly, and left me all alone. What shall I do?"

Farmhands came out one by one from their sheds and the stables, and clustered around the dead man. They said not a word but some wiped their eyes with their sleeves, some said to the boy: "Don't cry, don't cry."

They found nothing else to say. Landlord Han was shouting again from behind the window:

"Throw him out! We won't have him howling here!"

Young Kuo stopped crying and kowtowed on the snow to the farmhands who were collecting a little money for the funeral. Later in the day they brought a used wooden case to serve as a coffin, carried it out to north of the village, and lowered it into a grave, which was soon covered with snow. That was in 1934.

Scarcely had the New Year festival passed before Young Kuo was thrown out of the Han house to shift for himself. He began picking up

broken bowls and plucking black currant leaves to sell for a few cents, and doing odd jobs. This way he managed to keep body and soul together. In 1940 he became a farmhand. He had broad and muscular shoulders, worked for all he was worth, and was never idle. Han wanted to make use of him again, and said:

"Young Kuo's a good lad. I knew it even when he was just a little boy. You know the man from the boy, just as a horse is known by its hooves." Han was all smiles. That was like him—when he wanted you to slave for him, he gave you a sweet smile. But when he found no more use for you, he wiped the smile off his face, glared at you, and told you to go to the devil. Young Kuo knew him very well and remembered how his father had died. But the job he had been hoping to get from Lord Lord Tang had just fallen through. And a man has to eat, he can't stay idle. Han took advantage of this to say:

"You work for me, Young Kuo. We're old friends. You'll be given better pay and lighter work here than anywhere else. I'll give you whatever you ask."

"I want six hundred dollars a year." Kuo thought Han would never agree.

"All right, you ask six hundred, and I give six hundred," said the landlord, suddenly generous. "I don't mind making sacrifices."

"Six hundred paid in a lump," Young Kuo ventured once more.

"We can discuss that later," parried the cunning landlord.

So Young Kuo found himself slaving for Han again. He tried not to recall his father, not to go near that small lean-to in which he had lived, not to stand outside the gate where his father had died. He usually went down to the fields before the cock had crowed, came back after dark, and went to bed after midnight. In rain and wind, he pushed and pulled and strained. But, when the end of the year came, his master did not pay him! Han killed a fat pig and distributed one half of the pork among the farmhands, Young Kuo's share being five pounds.

"Take it to make pork dumplings for New Year's Day. Look, what good pork it is! It's much better than what's sold on the market. Throw that palm-leaf tough stuff off on you."

Young Kuo was reminded of a weasel paying a courtesy visit to a chick. He tried to decline this gift.

"If you refuse, you're treating me with contempt," threatened Han, pursing his lips in displeasure.

"All right, I'll accept," Kuo forced himself to say. So he took the pork to his friend Pai and made dumplings.

After that, Young Kuo entered upon the second year of his service under Han's roof. He was not happy about it, but he had no other choosers. When his jacket was worn out and hanging in tatters, he decided to make a new one, and went to the landlord's chamber for his last year's wages.

Han looked at him askance, saying:

"What more do you want?"

"All last year I worked for you, from morning till night, in wind and rain!" Young Kuo was furious.

"Didn't you eat my pork? You still want more money?"

When Young Kuo heard this, he was struck dumb. He was running to the kitchen to seize a chopper, but the bodyguard blocked his way and shouted:

"What are you doing, you communist?" Under the puppet Manchukuo regime, to label a fellow a communist might cost him his head. Meanwhile, Han had entered the inner room and taken out a loaded gun belonging to the Japanese officer. He released the safety catch, rushed out and pointed the gun at Young Kuo, shouting:

"Don't move, you bastard!"

"Fool!" This was from the bewhiskered Japanese gendarme officer Tamori Taro, who had strutted out from the inner room too. He stood there, glaring, adding his curses to Han's. The peasant stood helpless, burning with anger.

"Get a move on! Are you waiting for a hiding?" roared the bodyguard from one side. So Young Kuo had slaved for fourteen months only to get five pounds of pork. The next day he received the labour conscription order and was dispatched to a camp at Mishan. He came back after the Japanese surrender on August 15th, 1945.

Having finished his story, Young Kuo said to Little Wang:

"Han is a two-generation enemy of ours—my father's enemy and mine."

"Why, then, at the meeting the other day, didn't you accuse him?" asked Little Wang.

"All his family, all his relatives and friends, supporters and sworn brothers were there, rolling their eyes and trying to scare us. Who dared speak out? One couldn't do much single-handed. A drumstick can't make much noise without a drum."

"Why don't you unite with friends and fight together?" suggested Little Wang. "Join forces with those people who are honest and not double-dealers, people who have grievances against Han. Unity is strength, you know."

"If you want poor men who see eye to eye with us, the first one I think of is Old Pai of the south end," Young Kuo said, remembering his good friend.

"Let's go and see him," the political worker responded enthusiastically. He jumped off the *kang* and dragged Kuo with him.

Pai, who lived in the south end of the village, had a piece of land which he himself described as a "dry yellow mound which even hares would scorn." During the puppet regime, after he paid his taxes he had little left to keep his family going. Although he had not enough to eat and wear, he never worried, never hurried. He was a good-hearted and good-tempered man—but at the same time a sluggish, wool-gathering

fellow. He never could sleep enough. In rainy weather his neighbours would be worried, fearful of getting behind with their work and having a poor crop. But Pai said defiantly to the sky: "Go on raining, go on raining—what do I care! While you are raining outside, I can sleep peacefully inside."

"If you like, you can sleep, rain or shine. Who can control you? You're your own master," somebody once said. Hearing this, Pai jerked his chin toward the inner room where his wife was. He was a little afraid of his wife because he was lazy and drowsy, while she was able and industrious, a good hand at the scissors while sitting on the *lang*, and a better hand at the sickle while working in the field. In mowing and harvesting she yielded to no man in strength and skill. Because of her ability to get things done and his own inability to pick bones with her, Pai was defeated in the first battle he fought with her. Wherever he tried to recover his prestige, he licked the dust. After several reverses, he dared not try again. He was overpowered.

One day, when Pai and a few friends were chatting together, a young rascal asked:

"Is there anyone here who is afraid of his wife?"

"Own up. The one who is had better be honest and own up," another neighbour urged.

Squatting on the end of the *lang*, Pai was silent and began rolling a cigarette.

"Old Pai!" the first man called his name. "Aren't you afraid of your wife? What do the rest of you say? Is our friend afraid of his wife or not?"

"Be careful what you say!" Old Pai jumped off the *lang*. "Who am I afraid of? I'm not afraid of anyone!"

At this juncture, who should barge in but his wife, looking for him, a poker in her hand.

"Well, so this is where you are! You've been leading me a dance! And while you're enjoying yourself here, there's no more water in the vat and no firewood split, but you've plenty of time to visit friends!"

Pai slunk out, mumbling ineffectually. His friends laughed loud and loud.

Back in 1935, Pai had come to settle in Yuanmao. He had been a hard worker then, and had cleared fifty *mou* of waste land. That year the rainfall was favourable and the harvest good. Each man had a couple of Indian corn. He began to make his own corn, and got a good crop. The next year Landlord Han's horses were loosed to graze on the corn, and ruined a big patch. Because of this, he and Pai had a fight. Pai came to blows. The latter reported to his master, who sent a messenger out on his big black horse to revenge his faithful servant. So, the next day he descended upon Pai's hut and with a big cane smashed everything in sight—bowls, pots, pans, jars. Then, without a word, he turned and hoisted himself upon his steed, and rode off. Old Pai was left with a

at the village office, but it was ignored. Then he presented his case to the county court. Hearing of this action, Landlord Han, lolling beside the opium lamp, smiled coldly and observed:

"So he's brought a case against me? Good! I'll just lie here and deal with him. A few letters to the magistrate won't cost me much. But he—how much money has he?"

The puppet magistrate found Pai guilty of libel against an innocent citizen, and had him thrown into the county prison. His wife had to sell forty *mou* of land to get him out. These forty *mou* fell into Han's hands, and Pai found only a pebbly ten *mou* left. He suddenly became the most indolent of men, and said: "I only want enough to keep alive." He rose every day when the sun was high in the sky. He preferred wet weather to fine, because then he could sleep. On a sunny day he would look up at the sky and sigh: "Look, there isn't the ghost of a cloud in the sky—the old dragon is dying from thirst."

If he happened to be working in the fields, he would lengthen out the siesta. One day his wife brought him lunch and found him sleeping in a furrow in a kaoliang field. One night he failed to come home, and his wife began to worry and set out in search of him, a poker in her hand. He was nowhere to be found. She asked mower, swineherd and carter, but no one had seen him. Throwing down her poker, she appealed to the neighbours to help her search, afraid her husband might have come across a wild bear or slipped into the river. She was really worked up. When the crescent moon was rising above the corner of her hut, her neighbour Old Chao ran in with the good news that her husband was sleeping like a top among the weeds on the river bank. She ran to the place and took him back. She was both glad and angry, and could not make up her mind whether to laugh or cry. That night she did not give him an earful.

Slothful and sluggish, Pai perplexed everybody and distressed his wife. She worried about rice, firewood and salt, till she was worn to a shadow. She had beautiful black arched brows, and she often knitted them over things which were no problem at all. Her husband, however, was quite different. He never worried, never bothered his head about food or clothing. "I only want enough to keep alive," he kept saying. As a matter of fact, they often went hungry and oftener quarrelled. There was an unending conflict between them.

"It's just my luck to live a life of misery with you," she would say.

"With another man you couldn't be any better off. It's in your stars."

"You're such a lazy devil, no wonder you're poor!"

"You work hard, but does it get you anywhere? Where are your chicks? Didn't they all die overnight? And where's your porker?" Pai had no sooner said this than he regretted it. His wife's eyes flooded with tears, which coursed down her cheeks. She had bought a sucking pig, meaning to feed it up till it was fat, and sell it at New Year for a little money with which to make herself some new clothes. Every day, carrying her baby boy, Little Button, in her arms, she had sorted out vegetable

leaves and mixed them with husks for fodder—she had gone to no end of trouble. By August the pig had filled out. One day, it strayed into Han's garden and trampled down some flowers. The landlord, levelling his gun at it, when she hurried into the garden with her child in her arms. She gripped his gun, and implored him to pardon her this once.

"Pardon, indeed! How many times have I pardoned you already? If you want to save your pig, you must pay for my flowers." Han snatched his rifle around and threw her to the ground together with the three-year-old boy. The child's head knocked against a stone, making a deep gash in his right temple which bled profusely. She carried the boy, bleeding, into her kitchen, snatched a handful of ashes from the stove, and applied it to the wound, then sat down on the ground, holding him close to her, and began crying. Then the landlord rushed over again and, this time, bang! he got the pig.

Within a couple of weeks, Little Button died from excessive bleeding. So a boy and a pig had gone in compensation for Han's flowers. The neighbours came to console them. The boy was in the little coffin, and the mother was crying as if her heart would break, swooning and coming to alternately. Old women tried to comfort her, saying: "You must take care of yourself. You're young—you'll have other children."

Despite all the condolences, she was heart-broken. For three days her neighbours did not see any smoke curling up from her kitchen chimney. All the time she was crying at one end of the *lang* while her husband was moping at the other. Even happy-go-lucky Pai grew thoughtful.

In the old society, under the puppet regime, there was no end to the sufferings of the poor—sufferings of every sort and description.

One month had passed after the death of Little Button. The neighbours had their own cares and worries and were gradually forgetting the Pai family's misfortune. But Pai and his wife could never forget. The wound in their hearts remained open and unhealed. Little Button, so plump and lively, had been their treasure. Every night Pai's wife woke up, crying, and berated her husband for not having gone to court to avenge their child.

"Go to court?" Pai would answer ruefully. "Have you forgotten what happened last time? Do you want me behind bars again?"

As the days passed, they stopped talking about it and began to forget it less. But today Pai's careless mention of the pig in the past brought back the memory of Little Button and she cried again. Pai knew that it was too late. Feeling unhappy himself he took up a hoe and stepped into the yard to chop firewood. He split wood for three and a half months, then, tired out and overworked, he came home. He wiped off the beads of sweat on his forehead with the back of his black tattered jacket and stepped back into the room. His wife was crying on the *lang*, her body shaken with sobs.

"Is Old Pai in?" called somebody from the street.

"Yes. Is that you, Young Kuo?" Pai answered, going out to meet Kuo. Seeing his friend accompanied by a political worker, he ushered them into the room.

His wife had stopped crying and sat up on the *kang*, turning her face to the window and wiping her eyes. Kuo saw this and asked:

"What's the matter, Mrs. Pai? Is it another *struggle* with Old Pai?" Kuo was beginning to use the new political terminology which he had lately picked up from Little Wang.

"Mind your own business," said Pai, and asked them to sit down. He produced a basketful of tobacco leaves of his own growing, rolled a cigarette, and offered it to Little Wang. His wife got off the *kang*, picked out a few fresh plums from a wooden case, and placed them on a low table. Then she took out a tattered jacket and began darning it, bending her head.

After a little casual talk between the three men, Little Wang got down to brass tacks:

"We poor men must unite to struggle against the pot-belly—I mean Landlord Han. Will you join us? Have you the guts?"

"Why not?" Pai answered, and his wife shot a glance at him. "Don't look at me like that. What do women know about men's affairs?"

His wife was feeling a little better now. She said:

"Do you think him good for anything? Every day, when the sun is already ten feet high on the wall, he's still lolling on the *kang*. He can't take proper care of his land, how can he work for a common cause? Don't count on him."

"Mrs. Pai, don't underestimate your husband!" protested Kuo.

"Do you think we ought to tackle Han, Old Pai?" Little Wang asked.

"Ask my wife what she thinks," said Pai, curling up on the *kang* and puffing at his cigarette.

His wife jerked up her head again at the mention of Han, and answered:

"Why not blow his brains out? If you do, you'll be avenging my Little Button!"

"Who's Little Button?" Little Wang asked.

She immediately told him the tragic story from beginning to end.

"If we tackle Han," he asked her, "will you accuse him in public?"

She was silent for a moment, then she said:

"I've never done it before. I'm afraid I couldn't speak well."

"Aren't you two always arguing with each other?" Kuo reasoned.

"But that's different."

"What you can't say, get Old Pai to say for you," put in Kuo. "That's settled."

Then Little Wang and Kuo left them and returned to the little room in Li Chen-chiang's house. They continued talking from late evening till the cock crowed.

The villagers of Yuanmao organized a Peasants' and Workers' Union in Chao's hut. It started with a nucleus of thirty-odd poor peasants, hired labourers, and artisans. Chao was elected chairman and concurrently chief of the organization committee; Young Kuo, vice-chairman and concurrently chief of the land distribution committee; Pai was in charge of the militia and chief of the anti-traitor committee. Little Peasant Liu was chief of the production committee. The whole membership was divided into groups, Carter Sun and Tenant Tien being among the group leaders. It was decided that all the group leaders and members should get in touch with more poor men and peasants—who could see eye to eye with each other—and enlist them as members. Within three days they succeeded in contacting a number of new members—five new members of Carter Sun's group were all carters.

"Birds of a feather flock together!" Team Leader Hsiao said with a smile. When Carter Sun came up, he added in jest: "Oh, so you've drawn around you a group of carters. If you were member of the union, I suppose you'd turn it into a carters' union!"

"Didn't you tell us to look for men who can see eye to eye with us?" Well, I can only see eye to eye with poor carters," Sun explained.

Team Leader Hsiao and the heads of the various committees discussed things and decided to reshuffle the groups, and change some of the group leaders who were not suitable. Young Kuo and Pai were the current group leaders. Young and capable, they were like magnets, setting alight the whole village.

Kuo was twenty-four, four years younger than Pai, but he was older and thinner. After Kuo was elected vice-chairman of the Peasants' Union, Little Wang left his place and moved back to the village. As he was leaving, he told Kuo: "Rally more poor men, more peasants." Kuo then found a new man named Yang, generally known as Knobby Yang. Formerly a farm steward for six months under Hsiao, he was a dealer in rags and bones. He was still quite young, but he had many great weaknesses—he was cowardly and fond of snatching.

"Can the Eighth Route Army stay long?" he asked privately.

"Who told you they couldn't?" his friend asked.

"Nobody told me. I was just wondering." I was just wondering," hedged Knobby Yang. As a matter of fact, he was a coward, a neck Han.

"Old Yang, if we poor men want to stay in this village, we must make an effort. Our chairman Chao says: 'Earth sticks to earth, poor men stick to poor men and to other poor men.'"

peasants unite, we need be afraid of nothing. So why should we worry whether the Eighth Route Army will be here long or not?"

"That's right," agreed Knobby Yang, but he was unconvinced.

"Very well then, you'll rally more men, won't you?" his friend advised, then left him.

Vice-chairman of the Peasants' Union, Kuo was the busiest of men; he hadn't a minute to himself. He was forever talking to all kinds of people, explaining this, that and the other. If he could not straighten out a point himself, he took it to Little Wang or Team Leader Hsiao for elucidation. He told the villagers that the world was divided into two big families, one rich and the other poor, and that if the poor wanted to stop being poor and stand up, they must first do away with the landlords. All this was a commonplace now, but coming from him it sank easily into the minds of his listeners.

Different villagers received Kuo in different ways.

"Brother Kuo," a poor peasant said in a friendly tone, "you say the Eighth Route Army won't leave us, but what about the political workers?"

"They won't leave either," he answered in a tone inspiring confidence.

"Today the labourers hold the trumps. This is a real turnover. Brother Kuo, we support you," the farmhands declared.

"Each for all and all for each," Kuo quoted Little Wang's words for answer, feeling elated and smiling. He had the support of poor men. But he also came up against jealousy and taunts, flattery and threats.

"Vice-chairman Kuo is fine, I think he's even more capable than Chairman Chao." All the flatterers called him vice-chairman. "Come and see us some evening."

"Can a chairman still remember common men? He's up on top; we couldn't reach him even with a ladder," those who were jealous said.

"He's a mole cricket in a long gown and styles himself a gentleman," a landlord said sarcastically.

"He may be swaggering about now, but when the Kuomintang army comes back he can't escape even if he runs like a hare," sniggered some bad elements, formerly members of the interim puppet village administration.

Kuo knew only too well who were saying such things. Born and brought up here, he knew which villagers were good and which were bad, how this one had prospered and how that one had been impoverished. He acquainted the political workers with the local conditions and learned a great deal from them, including the new phraseology. Because he knew how to convince people, because Comrade Wang of the work team had stayed with him, and because he was now vice-chairman of the Peasants' Union, he was much sought after. On rainy days, Li's courtyard swarmed with people. Even ragged old women and young mothers carrying babies in their arms came in twos and threes for the latest news.

It was a sunny day, a day for mowing. Kuo in a straw hat and shouldering a hoe was leaving for the fields, when Long-neck Han ran into him beside a wood pile outside the gate and tugged at his tattered jacket.

"What do you want?" Kuo asked.

"I can't tell you here. Let's walk down to the south garden." Long-neck Han whispered.

"It's all right here. Out with it. I'm in a hurry."

"This morning," muttered Long-neck furtively, "Landlord Han said you work so hard for the community, yet without making a cent. You even miss your meals. How can you work on an empty stomach? He told me to bring you this money—take it as a friendly gesture." He shoved a sheaf of banknotes into Young Kuo's pocket and turned to go. The latter called him back and flung the banknotes at his long neck. A timely puff of wind sent the notes flying in all directions.

"Who wants your dirty money!" Kuo lifted his hoe, and Long-neck turned pale and ran for his life, sinking his long neck between his shoulders. The onlookers laughed and applauded. An elderly man said to Kuo, thumbs up:

"Good! That's the style!"

"Why didn't you give him a kick too?" said another.

Meanwhile urchins were running along the ditches and through the willow grove, chasing the windfall of money.

The next day the village was full of rumours again.

"Kuo's recruiting women for the Eighth Route Army."

"Girls and good-looking young wives are all wanted."

"What do they want women for?"

"Who knows? They say the women will be sent to other provinces, put in ration shops and rationed to any men for the asking."

"Now I see why Kuo has been asking: How many people have you in your family? Have you all enough to eat? How many women are there in your family and how old are they? All the time he's been like a weasel paying a visit to a chick."

The day after these rumours were spread, Kuo's room, which had been so crowded, became deserted. Even on rainy days, when there was no work in the fields, nobody called on Kuo.

And when he went out to call on people, he found a cold reception. Seeing him coming from afar, they would close their doors. Some said that a child was having smallpox and no visitors could be admitted. Some stuck a red cloth on the closed window as a sign that a woman was living in and visitors were unwelcome. Bewildered and in the dumps, Kuo wandered to the schoolhouse, sat on the floor, leaned against the wall and hung his head.

"What's the matter with you?" Team Leader Hsiao asked, and Little Wang stepped up.

"I can't carry on," said Young Kuo. "Say what you like, I can't make a go of it here. I may try some other place, but not here."

"What's all this about?" Team Leader Hsiao appealed to Little Wang.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Little Wang equally perplexed.

"They're all giving me the cold shoulder."

"What did you say?" exclaimed Hsiao.

"They don't come to see me, and they close their doors on me."

Team Leader Hsiao frowned thoughtfully for a while. Then he asked Kuo all the details. Putting two and two together, he came to the conclusion that the reactionary elements were stirring up trouble, and advised Kuo:

"Go and talk it over with Chairman Chao and the fellows you're closest to, then come and tell me what's behind all this." He added encouragingly: "We can never accomplish anything without a fight. A well can't be sunk by merely driving a spade into the earth—it's a slow and laborious process."

Kuo went to see Chao, and found him in low spirits too, also boycotted by the villagers. Together, acting on Hsiao's advice, they went to look up their close friends and poor neighbours, chatted with them, and finally understood the reason for the cold treatment they had received.

"Don't believe a word those reactionaries say! It's a thumping lie!" Kuo exclaimed.

And Old Tien responded:

"The political workers came all the way from south of the Great Wall to help us poor folk to stand up. Everything about them is above board. If they wanted women, they could find any number in Harbin. Why look for them in this village?"

"Take Team Leader Hsiao for example. What a fine man he is!" Chao had hardly finished before Carter Sun joined in:

"You're right. He's one in a thousand, and so are Comrades Wang and Liu. Who wants your women? Comrade Wang comes from our province too. One day I said to him: 'You're a credit to our province.' What do you think he said to me? He said: 'You're the real credit to our province. You're a good driver, and you're moving ahead along the revolutionary road.' Team Leader Hsiao is friends with us carters too. Everybody knows that it was I who first drove him and his team to this village. I remember he asked me on the road: 'Old Sun, do you agree that poor men should stand up?' I replied: 'Why not? Who wants to be downtrodden and on all fours all his life?' He smiled and said: 'If our Old Sun agrees, our revolution will surely succeed.' I assured him: 'Honestly, I've the courage. It's that courage that makes me go south and north.'"

"Well, you've a clever tongue, but you didn't have the courage to take the horse the other day!" Chao cornered him good-humouredly, and all laughed heartily.

"That! Well—" Carter Sun answered evasively. "Don't interrupt me. I say Team Leader Hsiao is a good man and I like to make friends with a good man. Last night I told him: 'If you want to go to the county town one of these mornings, let me drive you and I can guarantee no sticking in the mud or jerking.'"

Talk and laughter helped the village people to see things in a true perspective. The damaging rumours vanished just as wisps of smoke disappear directly they rise out of the chimney. And once again men and women, old and young, started going to Kuo and Chao to chat or ask them the news.

Li Chen-chiang, Kuo's employer, was greatly annoyed to see his farmhand on such intimate terms with the political workers, with so many people coming to him every day for advice and calling him vice-chairman. But he took care to hide his feelings. One night he sneaked into the Han mansion to report all the details about his farmhand.

"He does all this under your nose, hne!" said Landlord Han. "That means you can easily keep an eye on him. Find out what they are up to, and let me know."

Li Chen-chiang went home. With a short pipe in his mouth and a smile on his face, he walked slowly across the courtyard towards Kuo's quarters. Through the open window the poor peasants could see him coming and they immediately fell silent, so that Li could hear nothing. Thwarted, Li cursed Kuo inwardly:

"Wait—I'll teach you a lesson yet!"

One day, Kuo returned late in the evening from a meeting, and found the house gate locked and bolted. There was no answer despite his repeated knocks. By the light of the stars, he groped his way to the ditch below the fence, leaped over the ditch, and nimbly climbed over the willow fence. But scarcely had he put one foot down inside, when a fierce watchdog, evidently unleashed for the purpose, sprang out from under the eaves and tore a piece of flesh off his ankle.

Li's wife also adopted a hostile attitude toward Kuo. She was a stout woman of over thirty, who had treated Kuo pretty well before, having taken a fancy to this young, sturdy farmhand. She had often eyed him the way a thirsty woman looks at a ripe and juicy pear. One day while her husband was out and her daughter was playing in the street, she suddenly developed a headache, laid herself down on the *lang*, and began groaning. Then she called out to Young Kuo, and said that she wanted him to apply the "fire-cup" compress for her. He laid aside his work, found the cup, and brought it into her room. He found her lying on the *lang*, her face flushed, her large breasts bared. When Kuo came in, she winked and smiled at him. She said no more about the cup. She was in the best of health. He put the cup on the *lang* and backed out. Out in the courtyard, he heard her call reproachfully:

"Little bastard! You simply drive me mad."

She had continued to be amorous for some time, but lately she had changed, particularly since Kuo became vice-chairman of the Peasants' Union and was so much sought after by other men and women. She was his enemy and a woman, adding jealousy to her animosity. She no longer winked and smiled at him.

The morning after Kuo had been bitten by the dog, he was having breakfast in the outhouse when Li's little girl broke a bowl. Mrs. Li put down the chopsticks with a thump, leaned over the low table, and slapped her across the face. The little girl turned on the waterworks.

"Little bastard!" her mother cursed. "Stop that crying! You don't do a stroke of work all day, just eat and loaf. We're a farming family and live in a small way. How can we keep a loafer? You eat and drink your fill, then out you go visiting people. You certainly have a fine time."

Kuo heard these taunts. He put down his chopsticks and wanted to explode. But he controlled himself, and said calmly:

"Mrs. Li, don't point at the chicken and curse the dog. Who is it eats and loafs? Who are you swearing at? You had better make your meaning clear."

"Who am I cursing? If the cap fits, wear it!" roared the woman. Her shouts and the child's whimpering soon brought a crowd of curious spectators into the outhouse, while children were peeping into the room through the cracks in the papered window. Kuo stood up, quivering with rage, but the strength of will bred by long hardships enabled him to control his anger. He bit his lips, and said after a pause:

"Do I eat and loaf? I must get this clear. Day in and day out, I work like a horse. Directly I stop ploughing, I start hoeing. When I hang up the hoe, I take up the sickle. I mow the grass, cut the wheat, fix the trellises, sluice the fields, rebuild the *kang*, and plaster the wall. After that it's time for harvesting and hauling logs. Then I hatchel the hemp, chop the hay, fetch water, refloor the pigsty, push the grindstone, split the firewood, sieve the grain. My hands are never idle from one end of the year to the other. You rent over two hundred *mou* of land, and every inch of every *mou* is wet by my sweat. Yet you stand there and say I'm not worth my salt. Put your hand to your breast and see if a heart still beats there or not!"

"Listen, neighbours, do you hear what he's mouthing?" she shrilled. "Just two days as vice-chairman, and we people must kowtow to you and make offerings, eh? You devil!" Her husband stepped out of his room, and she rammed her head into his chest, seized him by the collar, and shook him back and forth. "You stand quietly by, watching me being insulted by your hired hand. Do you pay him just to torment me to death? What's the idea?"

Some of the neighbours pushed Kuo out and said:

"Don't argue with her. Go and get on with your work."

Kuo strode toward the gate. Fearing that he was going to the political workers, Li Chen-chiang ran after him, calling:

"Say, where are you going?" When Kuo neither answered nor looked back, Li added:

"Don't tell the political workers about this. What happened in the family can be settled in the house. I'll make her apologize to you later."

Seething with anger, Kuo was going to appeal to the political workers. They would comfort him, advise him, and perhaps help find a place for him to live, he thought.

After chatting with him for a time, Team Leader Hsiao asked him:

"Who is Pei Lai?"

"A bandit chief, they say," he answered, surprised at this sudden remark from the team leader.

"Have you ever met him?"

"Never." Kuo felt there was something behind this, and asked: "What do you mean, Team Leader?"

"I was planning to see you, to show you this thing," Team Leader Hsiao said with a smile, and pulled out of his pocket a slip of paper which had a few words scrawled on it. Since Kuo could not read, Hsiao read out for him:

"Kuo is a spy in the employ of Pei Lai of Taching Mountain" It was an anonymous letter.

"Team Leader Hsiao, please look into this. . . "

"I've already done so."

"If you believe this, better send me to jail."

Kuo had been feeling angry to begin with, and now here was this false accusation out of the blue. His eyes smarted and he felt a lump in his throat. He bowed his head.

"If I believed it, I'd have taken you into custody long ago." Team Leader Hsiao came closer and answered with a smile. Then he told Kuo that three days ago he had discovered this paper on the window-sill. The handwriting was identical with that on the invitation card from Landlord Han, so it must be another of his tricks.

"You just go ahead, regardless of them and all they can do against you. It's time you fought back," the team leader concluded, trying to comfort and spur him on simultaneously.

Kuo said very little, and did not mention Mrs. Li's attack on him. He rose to go. After the rain the road was muddy, but he just splashed along instead of keeping to the side.

"The reactionaries might have done for me, but for Team Leader Hsiao." As he waded through the puddles, he was more determined to fight back. "I'll follow the Communists even if it costs me my life." Before he knew it, he had reached the Li house. Not wanting to go in, he turned off and walked south until he found himself in Pai's courtyard.

"Is Brother Pai home?"

Mrs. Pai was in, washing the dishes. She did not look very happy. She was knitting her beautiful black brows and pulling a long face. She looked up and answered:

"He's out."

"Where's he gone?"

"Who knows? And who cares?"

Seeing that his friend's wife was in a strange mood, Kuo backed out. He was wandering down the road, when Chao called to him in a friendly tone:

"Come along to my house. I want your advice about something." He looked at Kuo and, finding him so blue, asked in surprise: "I say, what's the matter with you?"

"I can't find anywhere to live," answered Kuo. "Li Chen-chiang's wife has thrown me out."

"Come and live with us," Chao suggested.

"Live with you? Where will the grub come from?"

"I've a peck of mixed grain and bran left. So long as we have something to eat, we won't let you go hungry."

So Chao settled Kuo in his house. In the evening Team Leader Hsiao came over and found that Kuo had no bedding to speak of—only that patched and repatched colourful vest. When he went back, Hsiao sent Wan over with a half-worn shirt and a Japanese army blanket. The messenger asked:

"Do you know where Pai is? Team Leader Hsiao wants to see him."

"I don't know," said Kuo.

Where had Pai gone?

XI

As captain of the village militia, Pai was practically rushed off his feet. He often went out before dawn and came back after midnight. He had been rather slothful and sluggish, disliking hustle and bustle. He had always said: "What's the hurry? Take it easy. Tomorrow the sun is sure to rise again, and no dog will bite it off." Now he was a new man, no flies on him. He was always making plans for getting things done. Neighbours, who knew what he had been like, would say to him teasingly: "Brother Pai, what's the hurry? Rest a while. The sun is sure to rise again tomorrow, and it won't be bitten off by a dog." "No, I can't rest just now," Pai would answer earnestly. "I must take time by the forelock."

No one was happier than his wife. She had three hens laying eggs and often treated her husband to poached eggs when he came home late having missed his supper. For dinner she went all out to give him satisfaction, what with cabbage, oil, corn pie, and even dried beancurd. Every meal was as good as a harvest tuckout! At night she would sit up for him. They were happy as newly-weds! She told her neighbours

that the political workers had worked wonders, making hard workers out of loafers. "Heaven has opened its eyes for once, and sent along Team Leader Hsiao to save us."

One day when Pai had gone out, she had gathered a basketful of fresh beans from her vegetable patch. It occurred to her that she might make a present of them to the political workers as a token of her gratitude. So she combed her hair before the mirror and put on her best blue jacket, which had only four or five patches on it. She carefully placed ten fresh eggs on top of the beans and set out. On the way, she met Long-neck Han, who stood aside respectfully and asked her with a smile:

"Where are you going, Mrs. Pai?"

This man was a rascal, she knew. Her husband had told her about him. But like all women she was easily taken in, and when he smiled and spoke in such a friendly way, she answered:

"I'm paying a visit to the political workers. They're new here; I'm taking them some fresh beans and eggs. They're working for us, so we ought to express our thanks and see to it that they have fresh vegetables to eat."

"Who says they're working for us?"

"My husband told me."

"That's right," Long-neck admitted, remembering that she was reconciled with her husband now, and never quarrelled. But then, afraid he had conceded too much, after a furtive look round, when he saw there was no one in sight, he whispered:

"Mrs. Pai, do you know . . . ?"

"Know what?"

"You really don't?" he pretended to be surprised, and stopped short.

"What is it? Do tell me," she urged.

"I hear that Team Leader Hsiao thinks Brother Pai. Ah! I had better keep quiet. If I told you, you might blame me." He shilly-shallied and shuffled his feet as if to go off.

"Out with it," she insisted. "I won't blame you. I would, if you kept it from me."

"Very well, I'll tell you, then. Team Leader Hsiao likes Brother Pai very much for being young and progressive. Brother Pai says: 'But my wife is conservative—isn't it just too bad?' Now listen to what Team Leader Hsiao says: 'That doesn't matter. Do your work well, and I'll find you a nice girl. I know of one in the neighbour's hood, and I'll arrange the match for you.'"

"Oh! Match who with whom?" she gasped, her head swimming.

"He'll match Brother Pai with a nice girl, he says."

"Aha!" she fumed, knitting her brows. "I . . . you know the girl?"

"That I can't tell you." Seeing that she believed him, Long-neck tried to look even more secretive. Flustered and flushed, she turned to go, but he wouldn't let her.

"Why are you turning homeward? Aren't you sending the beans and eggs to the political workers? If you don't want to send them yourself, I'll go for you."

"I'd rather throw them into the river than have that Hsiao eat them! You'd better go on your way." She pushed Long-neck aside, and walked home with her basket, cursing the work team and her husband under her breath.

At midnight, Pai came home from the schoolhouse, sopping with rain. There was no light in the room—his wife had gone to bed. He pushed open the door and found the kitchen dark and cold with no boiling pot on the fire. He went into the inner room, struck a match to light the oil lamp, pulled off his dripping clothes, and spread them over the *kang*. Then he walked back to the kitchen. He found the ladle hanging above the stove and the pot empty, and there was nothing at all in the cupboard. He deliberately closed it with a slam, hoping to wake up his wife, so that she would get him something to eat, but the noise failed to stir her.

"I say, where are the eggs?" They had been on good terms lately and not had a quarrel for a long time. He was not angry, only hungry.

"You want eggs, eh!" his wife sneered, sitting up. "Think I don't know the way you loaf about all day outside, up to no good?"

"Get up and get me something to eat, so that I can go to sleep. I have to get up early tomorrow," he explained, hunting round for his eggs. He came upon a basketful of beans and eggs, picked it up and was walking into the other room, when his wife sprang up and lunged for the basket.

"No, you can't eat those eggs," she shrilled.

"Why not?" he retorted, exasperated. Then they started quarrelling and snatching the basket from each other, till all the eggs fell out and cracked on the floor, spattering them and the ground. In the silent night the noise was heard far and wide and drew some wakeful neighbours out of their beds—some came for the pleasure of watching a fight, some to mediate out of a good heart.

"Well, well, stop now! Husband and wife shouldn't quarrel," an old man preached.

"Do stop quarrelling. Least said, soonest mended," a relative piped.

"That's enough," said another well-meaning neighbour. "It can't be as serious as all that."

"Thunderclap for thunderclap in the sky, blow for blow in the bedroom!" Come on, let's have some more!" shouted someone who had come to watch the fun.

"Good neighbours," appealed Mrs. Pai, "please say who's right and who's wrong. He leaves all the chores to me while he potters about himself having a good time. Did you ever see the like of him? He never stays at home long—he says he must go out to work, to do propaganda, to fight the landlords and avenge Little Button. But it's all a lie! The truth is, he's chasing after girls. He's tired of me. The trouble is, he

never looks at himself in a mirror. I wonder what girl would take a scarecrow like him!"

"What the hell!" Pai realized that he was the victim of slander, and seething with anger darted at her. "You bitch! Must you loose your tongue at this hour of the night?" He lifted his fist, and she sailed plump into his arms, crying: "Go ahead, beat me! I want to die, I want to die." She sobbed and chanted at the same time: "Oh, my Little Button, how your mama suffers! Why did you leave me behind?" The situation was becoming quite serious, when a hefty fellow, stripped to the waist, stepped forward and dragged Pai out into the courtyard, saying: "Come over to my place. Don't argue with a woman. You're making a fool of yourself, and losing face for all of us poor men."

This hefty fellow was one of Pai's best friends. His name was Li, and he called himself Chang-yiu (Man of Property). He had given himself this name because he had never had any property in the world except himself, and he wanted to defy and exasperate the god of wealth. In fact, since taking this name, he had often had no fire in the stove, no smoke in the chimney, no rice in the pot, no quilt on the *kang*. In short, he was a have-not, growing progressively poorer, a blacksmith, about thirty years of age. Fourteen years of hammer and anvil, and he still had no steady job. Because of his height and bulk, his friends also called him Big Li. "Big Li!" folks would ask him: "You've been working half your life—why is it you still don't have a wife?"

"I don't even have bran to eat," he would answer. "What woman would want to share my ill luck?"

In 1941, in late autumn when the weather was turning frosty, the Japanese clerk Miya of the village administration had served on him the labour conscription order, and Big Li agreed to go at once, saying: "All right, all right, I'm glad to serve the government."

The Japanese was pleased and said:

"You're a cheerful fellow. You don't argue at all. Now go home and pack up. Tomorrow you must go."

That evening Big Li did not sleep, and people could hear him moving about with his tools during the night. The next morning, when the sun rose high in the sky, his door was still closed, and Big Li was gone. Hammer and anvil, pots and pans, he had buried in the ground. The room was empty except for a wooden rack and a pair of worn straw-sandals on the floor.

Big Li had carried away a hoe and an axe. He had slipped through the South Gate and run some six or seven miles, then stopped and crept under a kaoliang rick, sticking out his feet, which were soon white with frost. He had shivered till dawn.

Finally he settled down in a pine grove in the southern mountains, where his axe and hoe stood him in good stead—he got wood, grass and earth, and rigged up a shelter. During the day, fearing people might come for him, he lay hidden in the forest where he could see but not be

seen; during the night he slept in his shelter, secure from wind and rain. One night while lying awake on his bunk, he heard a queer hissing, stretched out a hand to feel, and touched a long, slender, cold, slippery thing. His heart missed a beat, but the thing wriggled away into the grass without hurting him. It was a big snake.

It was autumn, and he found plenty to eat in the mountain—wild apples and pears, black currants, sloes, hazel-nuts and mushrooms. He made occasional excursions to distant farms to pick up potatoes and Indian corn left over after harvest. During the winter that followed he fed on pheasants and partridges. If he was lucky, he even caught a roebuck. He would live off it for a couple of weeks and use its skin on the bunk. In spring there were all sorts of wild vegetables. So he managed for about a year. He made a clearing and sowed it with Indian corn and potatoes. After the Japanese army surrendered, he returned to the village.

When the Peasants' Union was established, Pai had called on Big Li and talked with him for a whole night, suggesting that he join it. "Let me think it over," Li replied. He thought for another whole night, and two days later told his friend:

"It isn't that I don't want to join the Peasants' Union, Old Pai, but I don't want just to drift with the stream. I want to put on my own thinking cap and wait for my own little idea to pop up."

"Has your idea popped up already?" asked Pai with a grin.

"Yes, and it's this: even if they cut off my head for it, I'm going to follow the Communist Party."

Then Big Li joined the Peasants' Union and was elected group leader.

That night, after he had taken Pai home with him, he asked him what had caused his quarrel with his wife.

"I've not the slightest idea."

Big Li laughed:

"You quarrelled all that time without knowing what it was all about! You're as big a nit-wit as ever. Now it'll soon be dawn, we'd better get something to eat. Then I'll go and explain to your wife."

Li went on in a low and earnest tone: "You know, the poor should help each other just as the rich help each other. You're an officer of the Peasants' Union and it's your duty to lead the poor in the struggle. How can you quarrel and give outside people a chance to laugh at us? Come on, you get some beans and cucumbers from the garden, while I light the fire for breakfast."

After breakfast, leaving Pai to wait in his hut, Big Li hurried off to see Pai's wife. She was just pouring slops into the trough in the courtyard, to feed a little white and black pig. She saw Big Li coming in through the gate, but bent her head as if she hadn't seen him, to stir the pig slops with a stick. The morning sun, throwing its golden beams through the willow branches, made the glittering silver pins in her loose hair sparkle.

"Mrs. Pai!" Big Li greeted her as he approached. She jerked up her head, gave him a glance, and looked down again. Her anger had not worn off, and her pretty black eyebrows were still drawn together.

"That little pig is well built. By the end of the year it'll be more than two hundred catties."

"Maybe," she answered coldly, without looking up. She was still angry with her husband and, to a lesser degree, with his friend for poking his nose into her affairs. He shouldn't have taken her husband away before she could get everything off her chest. When she had finished stirring the slops, she pursed her lips, took up the pail, and started into the house. Big Li followed her. He had come to act as peacemaker, but couldn't for the life of him think what to say. In the room his eyes fell upon a black jacket on the *kang*, which reminded him of Pai's semi-naked state. On the spur of the moment, he fibbed:

"Old Pai's got a splitting headache. He was drenched and frozen last night."

"Serves him right!" said Mrs. Pai, sitting down on the *kang*, and taking up her sewing. Big Li sat himself down on the other end of the *kang* and took refuge in rolling a cigarette, while mentally busy trying to find some way out of the awkward situation. After making a few remarks at random, he said:

"I remember you had a fat porker the year before last. How many catties did it weigh when you sold it at the end of the year?"

"Oh, it wasn't alive at the end of the year!" she answered. "During autumn, Landlord Han killed it with his gun." She remembered the train of misfortunes which had befallen her, and her eyes filled with tears. She was thinking of Little Button. Big Li, who knew the story well, took this opportunity to say:

"Oh, I'd forgotten. That was the year your Little Button died, wasn't it?"

"Landlord Han killed him!" She let herself go: "That old bastard! Someone should put a bullet through his head!"

Seeing that she had switched her fury from her husband to her real enemy, Big Li reminded her of Han's many crimes, then explained that the Peasants' Union would help the villagers to rise up and overthrow Landlord Han. "They'll also avenge the death of your Little Button," he concluded.

"That I do understand," she answered, "but why must he be always going out in the night?"

"During the day everybody is busy in the fields, and Old Pai has his own farming to do. The evening's the only time he has to go out."

She hung her head. Now, instead of being angry, she was feeling a bit ashamed of herself. Just a little gossip from Long-neck Han and she had gone and made a scene! She had not been fair to her husband or to his friend.

"Who was it talked to you? And what did he say Old Pai had been up to?"

She told the whole story, and he said:

"How could you believe a man like that?"

"Isn't he a poor man like us?" she fenced, although she realized she had been deceived.

"Aren't you a native here? Don't you realize yet what a bastard he is?"

"I thought a poor man had a poor man's backbone."

"But he isn't a man, and he doesn't talk like a man. You can trust Old Pai. He's devoted to the people. You should help him instead of pulling him down."

"Of course, you're right. It's all that Long-neck's fault! Does he still have a headache?"

"He? Who? You mean Old Pai? Well, if you stop nagging him, he'll lose his headache at once." Laughing, Big Li hoisted himself up. "I'm going to bring him back to you."

"Just a minute, please. Will you take this jacket to him."

After the big man left, Mrs. Pai quickly looked at herself in the mirror and did her hair. Then she borrowed a dozen eggs from a neighbour. When Old Pai came back, neither of them mentioned the quarrel, but she poached two eggs for him. Pai spent a day mowing, and only came home at dusk. After supper, he went out again to see the political workers. His wife asked him to take with him a basketful of tender beans, cucumber and fresh eggs for Team Leader Hsiao.

That night Pai came home a little earlier than usual, when the crescent moon was peering in at the window. He felt too warm and stripped off his jacket. He lay down on the *kang* and, his big bared chest heaving, referred to their quarrel of the previous night.

"How jealous you were! You didn't even trouble to 'investigate and analyze' before taking action." Pai was now full of modern phrases which he had lately picked up from the political workers.

XII

In early autumn the wheat was ripening, dotting the far-stretching green fields with yellowish patches. In the pool on the east side of the village, the small yellow flowers of the water chestnut, lurking amid green reeds, looked from a distance like a sheet of gold. The southern hills beyond appeared like so much vapour hanging above the blue horizon. Swallows were catching insects, twittering and circling in the air. Some perched under the eaves and began preening their feathers. Lately there had been plenty of rain, and the vegetable patches needed no more water-

ing. The sky had not cleared up completely yet, a few black or white clouds were still floating there. At noon, under the fiery rays of the sun, horses were snuffing from the heat, and dogs lolling their tongues. At night, the wind swept over the kaoliang and corn stalks and set the leaves shivering and rustling. The clouds gathered and blackened the sky and in another moment broke into a downpour, accompanied by thunder and lightning. The intermittent rain during the days past had turned the road into so many sloppy puddles and muddy pools, and the pedestrians, all barefoot, skirted the edge of the road.

Another struggle with Landlord Han was in the offing, a second mass meeting was to be called soon. Chao, Kuo, Pai, and Big Li were working day and night, mobilizing poor men for the struggle. The membership of the Peasants' Union had increased from about thirty people to over sixty. Middle Peasant Liu also went out on rainy days to contact his neighbours, and never missed an opportunity to report his results to Team Leader Hsiao. Big Li did not think much of this man, who was evidently hawking his merits rather than putting his heart into the work. One day, on his way home from another visit to the political workers, Liu ran into Long-neck Han. Since it was too late to avoid him, Liu greeted him with a smile. The lackey of the landlord asked him sneeringly:

"I hear you're an official now. What's the rank?"

"Oh, you know circumstances forced me to it. I couldn't get out of it." Liu gave an embarrassed smile.

"They say another mass meeting will take place soon. Who's the target this time?" demanded Long-neck.

"I've no idea. I'm in charge of production matters only." Liu hated the Han family too, but dared not offend them openly. Neither would he help Long-neck with information. He knew quite well the struggle was against Landlord Han, but he would not say so, and after mumbling a few words made off.

Team Leader Hsiao had had several intimate talks with Tenant Tien, who had told him how Han had seized his three rooms. Hsiao had tried to encourage Tien to struggle against the landlord.

"I fear he's unbeatable," answered the simple, honest old man.

"If you don't retreat, we'll all see you through," Chao told him.

"All right," the old man had agreed, half-heartedly.

The political workers and the activists met to discuss in private the coming mass meeting, and decided to make the case of Tenant Tien's daughter the chief indictment against Landlord Han. They agreed to arrest Han before the trial. This time he was not put in the school, but in a small shack, the window of which was sealed with a wire net. The work team assigned two guards with rifles, and Pai posted two men from the Peasants' Union with spears, who stood watch in turn.

The next day, after breakfast, the different groups of the Peasants' Union went out to call villagers to the mass meeting at the school. Chao stood at the entrance to the schoolhouse, shouldering a rifle, barring the

way to Han's relatives and supporters. Pai walked about on the alert, holding a spear in his right hand. Kuo brought out a large table from the classroom and placed it in the middle of the playground. Seeing the table, Carter Sun commented: "This is the 'people's tribunal!'"

The villagers straggled in in threes and fours. They formed a circle before the table, some speaking in low voices, some looking continually toward the entrance. On a pillar and a wall of the school were posted slogans: *Down with Han Big Stick—Poor Men Must Rise Up—Landlords Owe Us Blood Debts—Share Out Land and Houses and Claim Back Rents—Settle Accounts with the Local Despot, Landlord Han.*

As the militiamen walked Han onto the playground, Liu Sheng shouted the slogans and all the peasants shouted with him. By the time Han was standing beside the "people's tribunal," murmured comments ran through the crowd.

"This time, he'll be put in jail."

"Look! His hands are tied."

"Is he going to die—or live? What do you say?"

"That depends on what his crimes are."

Some people were not particularly enthusiastic about the struggle, not because they were related to or sympathetic with Han, but because they owned land themselves and had had dealing with the Japanese. They were afraid that after Han had been dealt with it would be their turn. Others thought that Han's son, who was with the Kuomintang army, might one day stage a comeback and take reprisals. Still others thought Han deserved a trial, but did not intend to speak against him themselves. After all, exposed rafters rot first. They decided to wait and see which way the wind blew. These three kinds of people kept silent.

Some of Han's agents were there, imagining people didn't know who they were. They acted like the keenest of the keen, shouting louder than anyone else.

Kuo presided over the meeting. Little Wang and Liu Sheng were standing by the table. Team Leader Hsiao, as usual, watched the proceedings from a distance, walking up and down where the crowd was thinnest.

Han stood beside the table, hanging his head. He was paler than last time. A number of children had swarmed round him to look curiously at the rope round his waist. One of the bolder children asked him to his face, "Landlord Han, why haven't you brought your big stick today?"

Stepping in front of the table, Kuo did not know what to do with his hands—he put them on his hips, let them hang limp at his sides, then folded his arms. With a flushed face, he looked at the gathering of about one thousand men before him and saw nothing but a black sea of faces! Some were jeering at him, he thought. The fine speech, which he had spent the whole morning preparing, slipped from his memory. Now his wits had left him and, with them, his speech. He started:

"Neighbours, we'll start our meeting." That was the first sentence of his speech, but he ended there, clean forgetting the rest of it. The villagers were holding their breath and waiting for him to go on. He simply had to improvise:

"You know me well—I've been a farmhand since I was a child. I can tend pigs and horses and till the soil, but I can't make a speech. I'm only good as a labourer. But our Peasants' Union is democratic; we can all speak out. Today we're fighting Han. He's our common enemy. We must speak out so that all wrongs be righted and all accounts settled. No need to be afraid. That's all."

Han raised his head. He could not see Landlord Tu, Landlord Tang, or any of his friends and relatives, and he felt more panic-stricken than before. Long-neck Han and Li Chen-chiang were there, but they dared not move or speak. The landlord decided to be meek, and agree to all their demands. He must save his skin. So he stepped up to the table and addressed Kuo meekly:

"Chairman Kuo, may I say a few words first?"

"Don't let him speak!" interposed an angry voice from the crowd—
Big Li

"There's no harm letting him speak," said someone else.

"The Eighth Route Army is strong on democracy. How can you stop a fellow speaking?" The man who said this ducked behind the crowd as soon as he had spoken.

Kuo ruled: "All right, you speak." It was his first experience presiding at a meeting.

"I'm a bad egg," started Han, "a man with a feudal mentality. My mother died when I was a little boy. My father remarried and my stepmother beat me every other day. . ."

"Stop this nonsense!" someone cursed

"Don't let him drivel."

"As I was saying," Han went on. Kuo stepped forward to stop him, but in vain. The chairman was not sure whether he had the right to stop a speaker.

"As I was saying, my stepmother made it impossible for me to live in peace at home. So I ran away, and unfortunately fell among bad company. At eleven I went in for gambling. At sixteen I picked up women in the street."

"How many women have you slept with?" asked White Goatee who had saved Han twice before.

"More than a dozen," answered the landlord with a snigger.

Again, this had the effect of changing the tenor of the struggle. Somebody said: "He's owned up to all his faults, he's sure to reform." Somebody else echoed: "He's all right except for his land holdings. And now he's given them up." There was a movement toward the door, and though no one had left yet, there was a relaxed feeling. Furious,

Kuo hastily pointed an accusing finger at Han's nose, and, with a flushed face, shouted at him:

"Don't let us hear any more such nonsense! Now tell us about your dirty work as chief of the interim Kuomintang village administration. And you kept private armed guards, didn't you?"

"That's true," admitted Han. He was all smiles, concealing his hatred for his former farmhand. "But then I was acting in the interest of the village, to maintain public order."

"Didn't you collect money from the villagers for the purchase of twenty-six rifles? What for?"

Han smiled again calmly.

"For the purpose of protecting the village."

Kuo raised his voice, his face crimsoning with fury:

"But you only kept the armed guards in your gun towers. When the bandits arrived, you treated them to a meal in your house and supplied their horses with fodder. Do you call that protecting the village?"

"Chairman Kuo, that isn't true. I hope you'll investigate the matter and do me justice." While putting on a bold face, Han was feeling nervous.

At this moment, there was a stir in the crowd. Big Li rolled up his sleeves and, with his brawny arms, pushed his way up to the front, with a hoary old man behind him. He announced:

"Old Tien wants to speak."

Standing by the "people's tribunal," Old Tien took off his tattered straw hat and looked with hatred and fear at his oppressor. He was trembling with rage, and sweat was breaking out on his wrinkled sun-burned forehead.

"Comrades, I want to say something—I want to have my wrong redressed." He looked at Liu Sheng, Little Wang and Kuo, and said:

"I hope you comrades will see that justice is done me."

"State your case to the whole community. They'll decide what's right," Little Wang answered.

Old Tien turned round to look at the crowd, then addressed Han:

"In 1939, I came to this village and worked fifty *mou* of land as your tenant. I, my wife and my daughter, we three had only one and a half rooms to live in, dilapidated and leaky rooms. On rainy days they were just a pool. At times you would say to me: 'I'm short of rooms, you had better move out.' I said: 'Landlord Han, where could I find a place outside?' You lost your temper and said: 'Go wherever you like. What the hell has that got to do with me?' I said: 'Landlord Han, I would like to rig up a little place of my own, but where could I find the ground?' You suddenly became a kind man and said: 'Ground is no matter. There's some space by the stable where you can build if you like. I won't ask you for any rent. With two or three rooms, your family will feel quite settled.' I went back and told my wife: 'Thank heaven, we've such a good landlord.' That winter I hauled logs from the hills, and went back

and forth with an old ox and old cart. It was a bitter winter with a heavy snowfall, so cold that my nose and head ached and my feet felt like ice. One day, when I was going downhill with a cartload of pine logs, the ox slipped over a stone, and, with a crash, ox and cart toppled down into a gully. The wind was howling terribly. What a time I had trying to pull them out! I finally managed it though, with ten or so carters who stopped to give me a hand. The old ox had one horn broken."

Somebody flung in:

"Old Tien, make your story short."

"Who's that?" Kuo snapped. "Old Tien, never mind. You just carry on."

"Your elder brother, who was then an officer in some forestry department, commandeered all my logs and sent them over to the Japanese military for firewood—those logs I had sweated so hard all winter to get! My old woman cried all night. The next winter I went again to the hills and hauled down cartloads of logs, and I also laid in dried reeds, earth and nails. The third winter I slowly built up three rooms—all complete except for a *kang* and two window frames. We three moved into the east room, but the next day you put three horses and an ass in our west room. You said: 'The animals are sick—the open stable is no good for them. Let them stay here for a time'."

"It had taken me three winters to build the place, and you must have it for your horses. My wife went down on her knees with tears in her eyes, and kowtowed to you and your son to have mercy on us and not make a stable of our new rooms. Once the animals were in, how could we live there? But your son only kicked and cursed her: 'You bitch! You forget whose land it is. Go on crying, and I'll throw you out of here!'"

Old Tien paused for breath and wiped his tears with his gnarled and withered hands.

"Three years to build a home, and you turned it into a stable. Your beasts with their droppings made such a stench, all the air in the house was foul and drew flies and mosquitoes. In the night the mosquitoes dined and attacked us till we were swollen all over from their bites. I resigned myself to fate and didn't complain, but you didn't stop there. One day, you came to look at that brown mare of yours, and when you saw our girl you talked a lot of nonsense. She was only sixteen and you were forty-three. You asked her to marry you and she refused. You dragged her off to the haystack and tore off her clothes, and when she bit you, you flew into a rage. You walked off, saying: 'Just wait.' Presently you came back with three men and declared you were going to tear down the house to take back the land, unless we gave you the girl instead. You and your men went in and dragged her away..."

Old Tien started crying bitterly, and some of the villagers shouted: "Down with the wicked landlord!" "Down with the local despot Han!" The audience surged forward.

"The four of you dragged her to the backyard and tied her to the tobacco rack with a straw rope. When she screamed, you rammed a handkerchief into her mouth. Then you yanked off her clothes and whipped her naked body with a willow switch. Her blood was coursing down her body, and then... and then...." Old Tien could not go on—he cried aloud. The crowd surged nearer. People shouted: "Beat him! Beat him!" A brick came flying up from somewhere and landed quite close to Han. This set him shaking all over. His face turned pale, and he stood there trembling.

"Strip him first!" shouted somebody.

"Kill him!" added somebody else.

A man came up and slapped Han across the face. Blood gushed from his nose.

"Good! A good blow! Give him another!" shouted somebody else.

However, the sight of blood melted the hearts of many, especially women, and silence fell. Who had dealt the blow? Landlord Han looked up, saw it was Li Chen-chiang, and understood. He bent his head lower to let the blood flow in big drops so that everybody could see. Most of the peasants were nonplussed at first to see Li Chen-chiang beating Han; later they understood, but didn't know what to do. Old Tien had stepped back a little in surprise, but Kuo urged him:

"Go on, Old Tien."

"I've nothing more to say," he answered. The honest but timid old fellow was bewildered, and withdrew behind the table. Li Chen-chiang took his place in front, and White Goatee edged up in support. The former trumpeted:

"Old Tien has been settling accounts with you. Being your tenant too, I want to accuse you likewise. I gave you a slap just now. Did you deserve it or not?"

"I deserved it," Han answered, and slowly raised his hands to smear the blood from his nose all over his face. Some admired Li Chen-chiang for his courage. Some let out a few more curses. But the majority, including Old Tien, kept silent, and gradually stepped aside. Li Chen-chiang continued:

"That year, when you were village head, the Japanese military wanted a supply of broken bowls, and you went round collecting them. I had no broken bowls in my house, but you insisted that I should pick some from the garbage piles. You said if I didn't do so, you would impose a fine on me. Do you admit it?"

"Yes, Brother Li," Han answered. He looked better, and was waxing more fluent too. "I'm a big bad egg. I've done lots of bad things because of this bad puppet-style brain of mine. It made me like to bully people. Now we've a democratic government, and the policy is lenient, I beg you to pardon me and save my unworthy life. I'll make amends, work for the Peasants' Union, obey Team Leader Hsiao and all committee members and

walk with them on the revolutionary road. If I fail to do so, you can shoot me."

"Don't wander so far from the point," said Li Chen-chiang. "Just tell us what you're going to do to pay for all the bad things you've done. Do you choose to be beaten, to be fined, to give up your property, or to sit behind the bars? What do you want?"

"Is the choice mine?" asked Han, and tried his best to hide a grin of satisfaction. "I'll do what people say I should. Anyway, I've been tried three times. I admit my mistakes and I'll accept punishment."

"Fine him one hundred thousand dollars," White Goatee proposed.

"Divide his remaining two hundred *mou* of land," Li Chen-chiang added.

The villagers started talking at once. Some suggested that he should be thrown out of his house. Some wanted him to be put in prison. Some said that he should be set free after he had accepted the fine and given up his land. Others had different ideas, and still others, completely dumb, strayed off, looking for a chance to quit. Middle Peasant Liu took the lead and went as far as the exit, and when Chao questioned him he said: "Last night a relation came to see me and I had a bit too much to drink with him. Now my head's aching. I must go home to rest." Some more villagers followed him out, mostly on the pretext that they didn't feel well, though some said they had work to do.

Carter Sun remained behind, but he didn't say anything, just squatted in a corner at the back. He rose to his feet when Team Leader Hsiao came up and asked him:

"Why didn't you speak up?"

"They took all the words out of my mouth," answered the carter.

"What do you think made Li Chen-chiang hit Landlord Han?"

Carter Sun smiled knowingly and answered:

"Well, a criminal landlord must be beaten."

"Was he really beating him?"

"Hard to say. The two of them are hand in glove, and they've both read the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.¹ I should say that box on the ear was skilfully given by a Chou Yu and gladly taken by a Huang Kai."

Team Leader Hsiao stepped forward and spoke first to the political workers and then to Kuo, Pai and Chao. After some discussion, Kuo stepped back to the table and announced:

"We shall break up now. It's a fine day, and you people probably have work in the fields. Before you leave, you may suggest what we should do with Han."

"Keep him in custody," answered many voices in chorus.

¹ A fourteenth century novel based on events which took place in the third century A.D. Chou Yu of the Kingdom of Wu had Huang Kai, another Wu general, cruelly beaten and then sent him to the enemy camp in order to deceive the enemy.

"Let him pay the hundred thousand dollars' fine, and have someone guarantee him. Nothing less will do," somebody added.

"Do the majority agree?" asked Kuo.

"That's right. Let him pay and go home," many concurred. As a matter of fact, they were eager to go home now themselves.

Kuo turned to Old Tien and asked him:

"Old Tien, what do you say?"

Old Tien hung his head and was silent for a time, then he said:

"I've nothing to say. I agree."

XIII

After the mass meeting broke up, Han was taken back into custody. By noon, Bodyguard Li had brought in the one hundred thousand dollars fine, and the guarantee sent by Landlord Tu and Landlord Tang. Then Han was released.

Back in their homes, even the enthusiasts among the villagers felt disappointed. They had gone to the mass meeting full of doubts, and come home full of new doubts. Some went down to the fields, some walked horses out, some harnessed horses to carts, some chopped hay, some weeded vegetable patches, some went fishing. Some sulked or lost their temper over trifles, others smashed bowls, whipped their horses, and quarrelled with their wives. Still others just lay on the *kang*, silent and moody, to while away the time. The even tenor of their life had been disturbed, but things seemed to be settling down again. The villagers felt themselves back in the old rut.

Carter Sun had not gone home. In the morning, he had told his wife that in this meeting they were going to deal once for all with the traitor. The way things had turned out, he did not want to go home and face his wife. He went up to Team Leader Hsiao and declared:

"Team Leader Hsiao, I don't want to be an activist any longer. This little official post is too much for me—it brings me only misery."

"An activist isn't an official," Team Leader Hsiao told him. "He's just a common citizen who dares to take part in a good cause and lead a group of people. If you don't care to carry on—don't care to be an activist—you may just chuck it, you needn't resign."

"It isn't that I don't want to come any more. You know I've been with you since you came here. I've put my hand to the plough and don't want to turn back. Only I feel bad when we lose every time we fight."

Team Leader Hsiao tried to comfort him and told him to talk it over with his friends, saying that it was impossible to eradicate overnight the power of the landlords which had existed for thousands of years. It wouldn't do to be impatient.

Liu Sheng was not happy either, but he said nothing. He sat reading a novel at the table near the window.

Little Wang thought that Han should have been shot long ago. He appealed to his leader:

"You ask Chao whether he doesn't agree with me that Han should be polished off."

"We can't just consider the wishes of a handful of activists. We must first work on the masses. The more people we can win over to our cause, the easier our work. We can't have too many comrades-in-arms. The proverb says: 'There's wisdom in a crowd.'"

Little Wang was not completely convinced, but he did not argue.

Team Leader Hsiao himself did not feel any better. It had distressed him to see the villagers going home in low spirits. He shared their disappointment, but he kept his disappointment to himself. He was a hard worker and a realist. Schooled by many years' experience, he knew that practical problems could only be solved by patient work, and did not want to waste time and energy in day-dreaming or idle talk. He also knew that people came to him for encouragement and solutions to their problems, not for his grumbles and sighs. After Carter Sun left, Hsiao held a conference with the other political workers and summed up with them the experience of their work during the few days past. He concluded:

"We're in for a sharpening of the struggle. We must work harder and be more cautious than ever. Squad Leader Chang, you tell the guards to keep on the alert. Old Liu, you might lay aside your book for a moment and go and find out what new tricks Li Chen-chiang and the others are up to. Little Wang, don't cry over spilt milk. You go and see Chao and the others. Wan and I will call to see Old Tien. He can't have told the whole story at the mass meeting. All right, that's all. Let's go."

Team Leader Hsiao set off to see Old Tien, followed by Wan.

Tien was chopping hay in the yard. Seeing Team Leader Hsiao, he hurried out to meet him at the gate. Hand in hand they went inside. The rooms still looked fairly new, but a stench of horse dung issued from the west room. Hsiao and Wan looked in at it. Since the arrival of the work team, Han had taken his horses away. The clay on the upper part of the wall, chafed by the horses, was peeling off, the straw showing through. The door-frame showed incisions where the horses had gnawed at it. The room was littered with dried dung and swarming with flies. It would be impossible to live in it, unless it was rebuilt. Old Tien led the visitors into the east room housing his family. On the *lang* was a blind woman of over fifty, white-haired, dressed in a patched and repatched blue gown. She was fumblingly twisting hemp threads.

"Team Leader Hsiao has come to visit us," Old Tien told her.

"Oh! Team Leader Hsiao!" she strained her lightless eyes in the direction of the voice as if she could see. Then, hurriedly wiping the edge of the *lang* clean with her sleeve, she said:

"Sit here, Comrade. We owe so much to you. As soon as you arrived, Landlord Han took his horses away from the other room."

She drew herself closer to the team leader and continued in a low voice: "Landlord Han is a demon, but now you've got him." She leaned over to the side and groped for the tobacco pouch. Old Tien lighted a stalk of hemp at the stove and gave it to Team Leader Hsiao to light his pipe. Hsiao began to talk, first of Landlord Han and then of the Tiens' daughter. The old man quickly signed to him not to go on, but it was too late—the old woman was already whimpering.

"You spoke of my daughter—she was cruelly done to death, Comrade!" Her eyes were flooding with tears, and her withered, blue-veined hands were trembling.

Old Tien tried to stop her.

"There you go again—and with Team Leader Hsiao visiting us."

She sighed and wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "That girl of mine had an unhappy fate. If only you'd come earlier, Team Leader Hsiao!"

"Let's go for a walk, Team Leader Hsiao," put in Old Tien. "Once she starts, she can't stop."

Out in the yard, the old man said with a deep sigh:

"She's cried herself blind. She's been crying for three years."

"Cried herself blind?" the team leader asked.

"Yes, women will keep harping back. Dead is dead. Only a girl." Absent-mindedly he put one foot into a puddle and his shoe was sucked off by the mud. He bent down to retrieve it, then continued, talking in a whisper as if afraid of being overheard. "But then I don't blame her for the way she mopes. A little boy had died before, so she set great store by the girl."

"How did your daughter die?"

"Let's go out to the north of the village," he suggested instead of answering the question.

In a short while, they were outside the village wall, and Wan cocked his gun.

"Don't worry, there are no bandits round here now—they've gone to Taching Mountain. Would you like to see my daughter's grave? It's just outside the north gate."

The setting sun was casting its rays aslant on the river, making the ripples sparkle. On both sides of the river grew green reeds. Water chestnuts had flowered. Swallows were skimming over the water. Water wagtails flew up from the river banks to soar in the sky, finally alighting on the river banks again. North of the river stretched a large expanse of fields where ripe Indian corn showed waving reddish tassels. Huge golden sunflowers had all grown facing the east. The south side of the river was overgrown with weeds. A small mound here, overgrown with grass, was Old Tien's daughter's grave.

They sat down among the weeds, and Old Tien went on with the story of his daughter. Han, he said, had tried to make her confess that the man to whom she was engaged was in league with the United Anti-Japanese Army. She never let out a word.

"Was he really in touch with the United Anti-Japanese Army?" Team Leader Hsiao asked.

Old Tien looked round and answered in a whisper:

"He was, and she knew it, but she would rather die than give him away."

"What's his name? Don't be afraid to tell me. Our United Democratic Army is the same as the United Anti-Japanese Army."

"His name is Chang Tien-yuan. My daughter would rather die than give him away. They beat her till midnight, before they let her go. She vomited blood, and within a fortnight she died from her wounds."

"Where is Chang Tien-yuan now?"

"That very night my girl told me to tell him to run away. He went south of the Great Wall. I've never heard from him since."

They stood up, and Team Leader Hsiao looked with new respect at the grave overgrown with grass. As they walked off, he said to the old man:

"She was a good girl. You must avenge her. Don't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid," Tien answered. They went back through the north gate. As Hsiao headed for the schoolhouse, he saw wisps of smoke curling up from every kitchen, where the villagers were preparing their supper. When he got back, he found Little Wang, Chao and others waiting for him.

Little Wang had called on Chao earlier in the afternoon. There he had found Pai, Kuo, Big Li and Knobby Yang. Chao was smoking while the others were discussing the result of the mass meeting. When the young political worker came in, they all rose to greet him and asked him to sit on the *kang*.

"Go ahead with your discussion. I'll sit here," he answered as he sat down on the edge of the *kang*.

"Han had his men at the mass meeting," said Kuo.

"Who?" asked Big Li.

"Don't you know?"

"Do you mean Li Chen-chiang?"

"Yes, that punch of his saved Han's life."

"And there was that man with the white beard again. Who's he?"

"He's one of Han's sworn brothers. He lives at the north end, his name is Hu."

"Comrade Wang, how do you think we should tackle Han?" Big Li asked, knitting his brows. "People still don't see eye to eye."

"Suppose we go to the schoolhouse and have a meeting?" Little Wang suggested. They all agreed.

They talked things over with Hsiao till midnight, and decided upon three steps. One, the Peasants' Union was to admit more poor men as members and to hold more secret meetings to discuss how to fight Han. Two, all members were responsible for watching what the rogues were up to. Three, a militia was to be organized. Big Li was made chief of the anti-traitor committee, Pai remained captain of the militia. Middle Peasant Liu was removed from the production committee, but the office was left vacant for the time being, since it was still too early to organize production.

"As captain of the militia," said Pai, "I'm responsible for its organization. There's no lack of men, but where can we find weapons?"

"We can lend you one rifle," said Hsiao. "The rest you must find yourselves."

Chao suggested that Big Li should buy iron and make spearheads. As for the money, the fine from Han could be appropriated. Big Li answered: "I could start that this very night." When they broke up, the full moon was hanging above the elms. By its pale light, they went home. In the small hours that morning Big Li started forging spearheads. Sparks from his red-hot forge went flying in all directions, and the clang of his hammer could be heard till cockcrow.

Discussion groups were formed. During the day, in the shade under the trees, in the fields, on the vegetable patches, on the river banks, small groups of peasants could be found chatting in low voices. After dusk, if you looked through the windows of many small thatched huts, you could see small groups chatting. At the sight of any stranger approaching, they stopped short. These were semi-secret meetings of poor men led by activists. In these small meetings, which fitted in with the peasants' way of life, poor men poured out their grievances, argued, agreed, and drew closer together, as they prepared themselves for the struggle against Han.

Every day, the activists sent in reports, and Team Leader Hsiao studied them and drew conclusions, which he passed on to all the groups.

In the meantime, Han knew nothing of what was going on in these small groups.

Liu Sheng had been sent by Hsiao to see Li Chen-chiang. He walked into the courtyard of Han's meeting-hall and, looking through the window into the lighted room, saw Long-neck Han, Li Chen-chiang and White Goatee laying their heads together. When they saw him they rose hastily and greeted him with smiles. He talked a while with them, then hurried back to report to Team Leader Hsiao. They all discussed the matter, and Big Li said:

"When Landlord Han was interim administrator, he set up the Kuomintang party branch in his meeting-hall. Before that, the hall was the meeting place of the Japanese-sponsored Eastern Asia Amity Association. Long-neck and Li Chen-chiang were in and out all the time."

"What about White Goatee?"

"He didn't go very often. But he belonged to the gang. When Han held a meeting of the gang, he went."

"We must keep an eye on them," said Hsiao.

Big Li sent people to watch the three men. Long-neck Han and Li Chen-chiang found it difficult to carry on, and Han felt as if he had suddenly lost his arms, ears, and eyes! The ground seemed to be yawning beneath his feet! The watch-towers of his house seemed to be crumbling down! Never before had he been so anxious. Unable to sleep at night, he kept smoking and pacing the courtyard, sometimes till dawn.

XIV

By the end of August the last mowing was over and the peasants hung up their hoes. The rainy season had set in. Most people stayed indoors doing odd jobs—replastering walls, chopping hay, mending grain crates in preparation for the harvest. They could have given part of their spare time to organize the struggle against Han, but they slackened their efforts and even ceased to meet and chat regularly. The uncertain political situation and the rumour-mongering of the reactionary elements seemed to have affected their attitude.

Meanwhile, the political workers had received instructions from the county Party leadership to persist in their work in spite of difficulties and to effect the land reform with the least delay. They were working day and night. Team Leader Hsiao was in the best of spirits though he looked sallow and lean through overwork, and had the beginnings of a beard. He said at a meeting:

"All right then, it's time we started dividing the land, houses, property, and cattle of landlords like Han, Tu and Tang. The more we give the poor, the better. And the quicker the better."

"What about the crops that haven't been harvested?" asked Liu Sheng.

"The crop goes with the land—whoever gets the land gets the crop," Team Leader Hsiao answered.

A land-distribution committee was organized. According to a calculation of the land available for distribution and the number of poor people in the village, each was entitled to five *mu*. Those who had horses were given plots far from the village, while those who had no horses were given land lying nearer. The committee divided into five sections which between them covered the whole village.

The section under Kuo was the most conscientious. Everybody in his section had to mark the boundary of the land given him with stakes, although at first people did not like the trouble.

"What should we mark the boundary for? We all belong to one village. Everybody surely knows everybody else's land without any sign," objected an elderly man who was not particularly interested in the matter.

"Better mark out the boundary with stakes, otherwise there may be trouble when it comes to dividing the crops," Kuo persisted. He and his men worked a good five days, staking out the plots, grading them according to the soil and dividing the yet unripe crops. A farmhand, Old Chu, dared not accept the land. Kuo laid aside all his other work to talk to him one whole evening, and finally Chu said:

"To tell the truth, I would like to have the land. Land is life—who doesn't want it? But—but I'm afraid . . ."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I've never told a lie in my life. Frankly, I'm afraid the political workers won't be here long, and the Kuomintang army will come back and cut off our heads."

"Don't you worry, the political workers won't leave us. If they do, you can hold me responsible," Kuo answered confidently.

"Come to you? Aren't you afraid of losing your own head?" Old Chu rejoined with a smile.

"Yes, come to me," Kuo insisted. "I'll find other poor peasants to help. Helping each other, standing firmly together, our Peasants' Union will be as strong as an iron barrel. What, then, need we be afraid of? Chairman Chao says: 'Poor men stick to poor men and together overthrow a kingdom.' Yes, we're stronger than the Kuomintang army—you think they dare come again? Come one, catch one—come two, catch a brace. Team Leader Hsiao says this is just how the Eighth Route Army on the other side of the Great Wall defeated the Japanese invaders."

Kuo realized that Chu was only half convinced and, knowing what was worrying him, he said: "The Eighth Route Army is stronger than ever."

"How strong?" Chu asked eagerly.

"Team Leader Hsiao says: 'Chairman Mao Tse-tung has placed more than three million men inside and outside the Great Wall.'"

When Chu heard this, he said: "I believe you, and I want the land I've six mouths to feed. You give me thirty *mou* of good land."

"You shall have it, but there's scarcely any good land left." However, Kuo none the less settled on him a tract close by the village. Later, in summing up the experience in connection with the land distribution, Team Leader Hsiao said: "Kuo combines work with persuasion. That explains his success."

The section under Knobby Yang worked in a different style. About thirty men gathered in his room behind the flapjack shop, each bringing with him boundary stakes. Then Knobby announced: "The work team is giving us five *mou* of land per head. What kind of land do you want? Speak up."

Nobody said anything.



XV. Cymodas. Cotton-Rose

"Why don't you speak up? Who's run away with your tongues?" demanded Yang angrily, making a wry mouth.

After a long while, an old man muttered:

"The work team is giving us land, free of charge. How can we pick and choose? We'll take what we're given."

"What if you agree to what's given and then criticize me behind my back?" Yang asked.

"I promise you nobody will criticize you behind your back. And there's no need to look at the land or mark off the boundaries."

"You decide everything for us, Knobby, and save us the trouble."

"All right, then, as you trust me, I'll manage everything for you. Those who have horses will be given land a little farther away."

"Whatever you say goes."

"The crop goes with the land. There mustn't be any squabble over it."

"We all belong to one village—why should we squabble?"

"That's settled then. The meeting is adjourned. If you go back now, there's still time to do some work."

"Right, Old Yang understands us."

The thirty-odd men dispersed, leaving behind their thirty-odd wooden stakes to be used as fuel in the flapjack shop.

That night, Knobby Yang got the proprietor of the flapjack shop to help him draw up a list of men and pieces of land. By the light of a kerosene lamp, the flapjack man scrawled till midnight. The next morning, Knobby Yang strode into the schoolhouse, handed the list to Team Leader Hsiao and declared:

"The work is done. Who gets what—it's all written there."

"Quick work!" Team Leader Hsiao looked at Knobby Yang's head with the hair parted in the middle, then he started studying the list, but, as he did so, he knitted his brows.

"This doesn't read like land distribution, it looks more like an account. Did you write this list yourself?"

"We co-operated, the flapjack man and I."

"Can you read and write?"

"Not very well."

Team Leader Hsiao picked out one item which read:

"Chang Ching-hsiang, three mouths to feed, no land, no horse—gets fifteen mou of flat land south of the village, originally belonging to Han."

"Go and fetch Chang here," said Hsiao.

"All right," Knobby Yang went off, thinking: "I'm finished this time." But he had to do as he was told. When he saw Chang, he said:

"When you see Team Leader Hsiao, mind you thank him properly for giving you land. Don't say anything about the stakes."

"Don't worry, Old Yang. I'll just thank them. The young man promised. He trusted Yang because he was an old neighbour and an impor-

tant man in connection with the land distribution work. When he saw Team Leader Hsiao, he saluted and said:

"Thank you very much for giving me land. My father and my father's fathers never had any land of their own. Now I've fifteen *mou*!"

"Is it good land?"

"Couldn't be better. It's flat and lies hard by the village. In the past no peasant without a horse could ever hope even to rent, let alone own it."

"Where is it? How far from your house?"

"Oh, within a stone's throw. Not far at all."

"Tell me exactly where. Whose land was it originally?" Hsiao pressed him.

"It's on the bank of the river outside the north gate. It belonged to Landlord Tu."

Suppressing a laugh, the political worker pulled out from his pocket Knobby Yang's list, and read aloud:

"Chang—gets fifteen *mou* of land south of the village, originally belonging to Han."

The whole room exploded with laughter, and the peasant looked flabbergasted. But when he saw the team leader was laughing too, and hadn't blamed him, he hastily owned up:

"It's not my fault. Old Yang told me: 'Mind you thank Team Leader Hsiao properly for giving you land, and don't say anything about the stakes.'" He turned around and called. "Old Yang! Old Yang!"

"He's gone," said Wan.

"Old Yang's taking care to keep out of trouble, and leaving me in the lurch. Well, all right, Team Leader Hsiao, you may punish me as you please, and I'll take it."

"You aren't to blame for this. You go on home. Only the land for your section will have to be divided all over again. Old Wan, tell Chairman Chao from me that he'd better see to this section himself." He laid aside the list, and asked a white-haired old man who had just come in:

"What can I do for you?"

"They say that the political workers are leaving. So I came to see you off," the old man said.

"Who told you so?"

"Everybody says so."

"You go and tell them our work team isn't leaving. Nor is the Eighth Route Army. We won't leave this village until we've done away with the reactionary elements in it. We hope all the villagers will set their minds at rest." After the old man had gone, Chao came in and reported to Team Leader Hsiao:

"The land distribution done by Knobby Yang is false. He didn't get his men to stake off the boundaries. The Peasants' Union held a meeting to discuss the matter and decided to remove him from his post. But

he wept and said that he realized his mistake and wanted to correct it. Now what should we do with him?"

"What did the majority at the meeting say?" the political leader asked.

"They said: 'Knobby Yang was originally a peasant. Let him off this time and give him a chance to correct his mistake.'"

"Very well, then give him a chance. But you must always help him along. What about you, did you take your share of land?" the team leader asked.

"Me? Well, if I had refused, how could I have persuaded others to take their shares?"

"Then you aren't afraid of the Kuomintang army coming to chop off your head?"

"It's a question of who'll chop whose head!" Chao answered, bringing his rifle down on the floor with a thump. "With this, we'll let the Kuomintang troops and their American step-fathers come, but won't let them get back alive."

"Have you anything else to do today?" Team Leader Hsiao asked.

"No, nothing more."

"Then let's go for a walk," he suggested. "Old Wan, you stay here."

They strolled along the roadside in the shade of the elms, through whose thick foliage the sun's rays were falling like golden discs to the ground. The south wind was wafting the scent of ripening wheat and grass. Early autumn in Northeast China is the best time of the year—neither too hot nor too cold. The countryside is still green in spots, and the countryfolk not too busy. Chao, his rifle slung across his shoulder, was walking alongside his leader. Presently he left the road to plunge into some bushes and soon emerged with a cluster of small red fruit in his hand. Putting one into his mouth, he said:

"Crab apples are at their best at harvest time."

Team Leader Hsiao tasted one and found it rather sour. They walked on chatting. Chao said:

"Black currants are even more sour. In the puppet Manchukuo time, you had to pay a tax in kind even for them."

A flock of grey and white geese in the ditch craned their necks at the men's approach, and waddled, cackling, up and down, but without scattering in fright. One gander looked ludicrous trying vainly to shake off a green willow leaf sticking to its red bill. A man who was watering a horse by the well called to Chao:

"Nice weather for a stroll isn't it, Chairman Chao?" He was turning the handle of the pulley. Nodding and smiling, Chao answered:

"Yes."

They walked on. Sparrows were pecking slightly on the lower twigs of the willows, and behind the poplars were curling up grass snakes. From the kitchen where the villagers were preparing lunch, a few were crowing here and there. Creaking on the road to the village was a

three-horse cart piled high with sheaves of hay and weeds, on top of which were several bulging sacks.

"Have some corn." The young peasant in a straw hat drew in rein, and hailed them, then pulled out a dozen ears of corn from one of the sacks and tossed them to Chao. A colt, who had been following behind the cart, took advantage of this halt to hurry forward to suck from its dam.

They walked on. On either side of the road were bright yellow sunflowers towering above the green pea plants on the trellises. They walked into a vegetable garden and sat down on a stack of firewood. Chao rolled a cigarette. Here, for the first time, Team Leader Hsiao proposed to him that he should join the Party. They had a long talk on the subject.

That night Chao did not sleep a wink. He felt so happy, now that he was to become a member of the Chinese Communist Party. He turned over and over on the *kang*, until his wife woke and said:

"Why aren't you sleeping? What are you thinking about?"

He did not answer her. Before daybreak, while the sky was twinkling with stars and the earth was wet with dew, he was off to see Team Leader Hsiao, his rifle slung across his shoulder. He was given a form to fill in. He, a poor peasant, was now a candidate member of the Chinese Communist Party. Another three months, and he would be a member! As the one to introduce him, Hsiao put down his view of Chao:

"A poor peasant, honest and able, willing to sacrifice everything for the cause of the workers' and peasants' liberation."

Later, Kuo, Big Li and Pai were also admitted to the Party as candidate members.

XV

Things were looking up. The United Democratic Army under the command of General Lin Piao had dealt a crushing blow to Chiang Kai-shek's American-equipped troops, making it impossible for them to raise their heads again in the Northeast. The news of the victory cheered the hearts of the peasantry, giving a fresh impetus to the mass movement.

The rumours had lost their attractiveness. The landlords and their lackeys had withdrawn into their shells. All they could do was to spy furtively on the poor peasants' activities, and try to choke them off by spreading rumours, pitting one man against another and firing stray shots in the dark. Villagers called on the work team and the Peasants' Union at all hours of the day and night. The discussion groups were active again. Even Middle Peasant Liu, who had shown the white feather and betaken himself to a shack on the hillside, showed up again in the village. Carter Sun, as he drove Landlord Tu's big cart, would

tell people: "I was the one who brought the political workers here in my cart!"

Knobby Yang was working much more keenly too. He had distributed the land and was now leading a discussion group. Team Leader Hsiao, Little Wang, and Liu Sheng went regularly to these small groups to give talks on current events. They used stimulating questions to explain why the poor should rise up. They told stories about the achievements of Chairman Mao, the Communist Party, the Eighth Route Army, and the United Anti-Japanese Army. Liu Sheng taught them many new songs, and soon the villagers were singing about Chairman Mao and the Eighth Route Army. They learned songs too from the opera *The White-haired Girl*, and the song *Without the Communist Party, There Would Be No New China*. The villagers said: "You've opened our eyes all right! It's as if you'd opened two windows in our minds—now everything's clear!"

Chao, Kuo, Big Li and Pai were as busy as ever. One moonlit night, on their way home after a meeting, Kuo and Big Li were passing the gateway of Landlord Han's house when they saw a flickering light in the courtyard. Curious, they stopped in their tracks and the next instant heard footsteps and voices.

"That swinehead is a source of trouble," said a voice, Landlord Han's.

"Yes, he must be put out of the way," answered another voice, Long-neck Han's.

"That's not so easy now," said the landlord. "You get hold of Yang and handle him tactfully." The two men conferred in whispers for a time, so that Kuo and Big Li could hear nothing. Finally, they heard Landlord Han say: "All right. If you can't come yourself, send your boy along!"

The wicket-door slammed, and the two activists quickly took cover behind the trees and slipped around the corner.

"Who is Han's swinehead?" asked Kuo. "Isn't it Young Wu?"

"Yes. Landlord Han raped his mother, then sold her to a brothel in Shuangcheng. Don't you remember that?" answered Big Li.

"Another blood debt Han will have to settle. I wonder why we haven't remembered the boy before. Why not get him to join our group?"

"Who's the Yang they were mentioning just now? Do they mean Knobby Yang?" Kuo asked.

Instead of going home, they went to the schoolhouse to report to Team Leader Hsiao what they had just heard. Chao and Pai were there too. Team Leader Hsiao asked:

"What sort of man do you think Knobby Yang is?"

"He's a poor man," said Big Li. "Used to be a dealer in rags and bones. He has a weakness for petty gains."

"Is he on good terms with Han?" the team leader asked.

"No, I don't think so," Big Li answered.

"Han once gave him a beating," Kuo added.

"When the Japanese devils wanted flax," said Chao, "Han used to go round with his big stick collecting it for them. If he found anybody had gone to bed without having hatched the daily quantity of flax, he would give him a beating."

"Plenty of people felt his stick on their backs," said Pai.

"You must have felt it more than once, Old Pai," chuckled Kuo, remembering Pai's propensity for sleeping in the past.

"Oh yes, two or three times." Knowing that his friend was laughing at him for his former failing, Pai cut down the number of beatings he had received.

"Your wife once told me you'd had eight beatings at least," said Kuo.

"You shouldn't believe her," Pai fenced.

Meanwhile, Team Leader Hsiao had been thinking over Knobby Yang's case. Now he said:

"As a committee member, Knobby Yang shouldn't be removed too hastily. But I hope you comrades will have a good talk with him." Then they dispersed.

Knobby Yang was as fond of small advantages as ever. He liked to act on his own authority instead of consulting Chao or Kuo, whom he looked down upon as illiterates. He was conceited, knowing a few characters.

"Who's he, that fellow Kuo? How much is he worth?" he would say.

Since he had been made a member of the land distribution committee, the village rascals had started to make up to him, and often treated him to pancakes and dumplings. With his mouth greased, he was quite liberal in his promises to do everybody favours.

"Brother Yang, could you help me to straighten something out?"

"Sure! Just bring your problems to me. I can turn big problems into little ones, and little ones into no problems at all!"

"Brother Yang, I'm in a fix. Could you put in a word for me with the political workers?"

"That's easy! Team Leader Hsiao always listens to me." As a matter of fact, he was afraid of the team leader and seldom dared to call on him.

One evening, when he went home from a meeting, the proprietor of the flapjack shop told him that Long-neck Han had sent his boy to ask him to his house. Knobby Yang knew Long-neck Han for what he was, but still he went, for politeness' sake. When he got there, Long-neck told him: "Landlord Han invites you to dinner this evening." Knobby Yang was in a quandary: To go would be against the regulations of the Peasants' Union, while not to go would look rude. He thought it better to accept the invitation.

When he heard his dogs barking, Landlord Han, wearing a lined gown, ran out with a beaming smile to greet his guest, and bowed him into the east wing of the mansion. The room was lit by a kerosene lamp hanging from the ceiling. A mat had been spread over the *kang*, and

the chest on it was piled high with folded cotton-padded quilts with red silk covers printed with big flower patterns and pink silk covers printed with small flower patterns. One blanket was brightly embroidered with a crane standing under a pine, a symbol of longevity; another, with a plum tree in bloom, a symbol of five blessings. On the other side of the room, opposite the *kang*, were an oblong red-lacquered trunk embossed with a golden phoenix design, a glass case, and a full-length mirror. Everything in the room had been polished till it shone.

The host asked the guest to sit on the *kang*, but the latter thought it too great an honour for him. Instead, he sat bolt upright on a red-lacquered stool. Han took a packet of cigarettes from the table on the *kang*, and offered one to Knobby Yang.

In the meetings Knobby Yang had joined with the others in condemning Han, and, on such occasions, had really almost hated him. Now all this was forgotten. It was enough for him that the once haughty landlord was today treating him as an equal. A bad man had become a good man, he thought. And instead of calling him Old Knobby, Han addressed him respectfully.

"Chairman Yang, we've roebuck venison today!"

"Oh, please don't call me chairman. I'm not a chairman."

"Oh! Aren't you chairman?" The landlord feigned surprise and sighed. "I thought you were. Anyway, you should be. You're better than them in every way." He stopped short and called out to the kitchen: "Is dinner ready?"

The cook came in, placed a low table on the *kang*, set on it chopsticks, spoons, saucers, bowls, a decanter, and the first four cold dishes.

"Help yourself. I'm afraid I've no delicacies to offer you, but we're old friends, Chairman Yang."

They sat on the *kang*, drinking and chatting. The cook served one course after another—cakes with meat stuffing, stewed mushrooms, goose eggs, trout, steamed roebuck venison. Han assiduously plied his guest with wine, and Knobby Yang was soon half seas over.

"If I were the team leader, I would have made you chairman of the Peasants' Union long ago. You're as much better than Young Kuo as gold is than silver. Both of you have been with me, so I know the difference only too well."

Knobby Yang said nothing, but bent his head and drained another cup. Han did not go on, he just continued to ply Knobby with food and wine.

"Have some of this venison, Chairman," he urged, pointing his chopsticks to the dish. "I remember you like rich flavouring, so I told them to put in an extra pinch of salt." He called into the inner room: "Aicheng! Come in here!"

The white curtain over the door was raised, and Han's daughter appeared, dressed in a gauzy silk tunic with pink flowers on a white

ground, and snowy silk trousers. Her tunic was unbuttoned at the neck, disclosing the tightly fitting red brassiere round her plump breasts. This made the effect all the more dazzling. She sat down on the edge of the *kang*, and looked at Yang out of the corner of her eye. Then she took up the decanter and poured him another cup of wine. Knobby Yang got a good whiff of the scent from her sleeves and her hair. Not knowing what to do with his hands, he clutched at his cup in such agitation that he spilled the wine all over the table, mat and his clothes.

"Have another cup, Old Yang. Excuse me, but I must leave you for just a minute." Han then left for the west wing.

In the west wing, his wife confronted him and squawked:

"See what you're doing with my daughter! You let her go so cheap!"

"Shut up! What do you know about it?"

In the east wing, Han's daughter was pouring another cup of wine for Yang.

Avoiding her eyes, Knobby gazed, fascinated, at her fat, dimpled hands.

"Chairman Yang, do have another cup. This is papa's own wine"

"So you are here! I've been looking high and low for you." A face suddenly appeared outside the window. It was Young Chang, who belonged to Knobby Yang's discussion group. The sight of his leader clinking cups with Aicheng infuriated him, and he bellowed: "You're having a good time, drinking here! Go on, go on! I'll go and tell them." He was off.

Knobby Yang put down his cup, leapt off the *kang*, rushed out, and overtook Young Chang. Angry and anxious, he wanted to give this colt a good thrashing.

"Who told you I was here?" he thundered.

"They've all arrived for the meeting and been waiting for you a long time. The flapjack man told me you'd gone to Long-neck's place, and from there I came here. You go off on a spree, and have the cheek to shout at me! I'm going to tell them I found you drinking and carrying on with Han's daughter."

Knobby Yang decided to soft-soap him

"Don't tell them, there's a good lad. I'll make my own confession. I'll correct my mistake."

Since he admitted his mistake, and as he was an officer of the Peasants' Union, Young Chang promised to keep the matter a secret. Knobby Yang dismissed the meeting on the pretext that he had a headache. Then he went straight to see Team Leader Hsiao and told him that Young Chang had worked for the Japanese during the puppet Manchukuo regime and was a traitor. "How can a collaborator be accepted as a member of the Peasants' Union?" he asked.

"I'll look into the matter," said Team Leader Hsiao.

The next day Knobby Yang came again and said:

"On August the fifteenth, 1945, when the Japanese Army surrendered, Young Chang stole some of the Japanese military supplies. He picked up a rifle, and stowed it away."

It was impossible to tell whether this was true or not, so they decided to suspend Chang's membership for the time being.

Two days later, Landlord Han invited Knobby Yang a second time. The landlord drank and chatted with him till midnight. Soon the wine went to Yang's head, and he started looking at the curtained door. Han knew what he wanted, but kept silent.

"Have they all gone to bed, Landlord Han?" Knobby asked.

"Who?"

"Mrs. Han."

One was a hypocrite, and the other was a liar. But each understood the other, and kept a straight face.

"Oh yes, she isn't feeling well, she may have gone to sleep too." There was something insinuating about the landlord's answer.

Knobby Yang rose to go.

"What's the hurry? Don't go yet. I've something to ask you, Chairman." Han went into the inner room and, coming back immediately, said:

"Last time you were here, my daughter saw there were holes in your jacket and trousers. So today she would like to take your measurements to make you a new suit. She said: 'All this talk about getting the poor to stand up—why, they're more ragged than ever. It's a shame!' She said too: 'Chao and Kuo and the rest of them are a good-for-nothing lot. It's ridiculous to mention them and Chairman Yang in the same breath. You might as well mix a pearl with peas and sell them at the same price! To think he should rank lower than them! If it were up to me....' I told her not to be childish."

Knobby Yang remained speechless.

"Shall we go into the inner room?" Han invited.

The host drew aside the curtain, and the guest stepped into the inner room. By the light of the bright ceiling lamp, he saw at once—not the table set with food and wine, not the luxurious furniture, not the calligraphy and painting hung on the smartly papered wall, not the red silk curtains, not the screen on the *lang*, not the mirror above the door—he saw only the girl standing by the *lang*. She stood there in the light clad in black silk trousers, a white silk jacket, transparent as a cicada's wing, and a pink vest over her bulging breasts. Her hair was loose over her shoulders as if she had just got up from sleep. She set Knobby's heart fluttering. He felt quite carried away.

Han asked Knobby to sit on the *lang*, then excused himself and left the room.

They drank three cups in succession. Han's daughter got drunk easily. Her cheeks flushed pink as peach blossoms. She undid the top buttons of her jacket to show her pink vest, and mewed:

"Oh! I feel so hot!"

She reached toward the window sill for a fragrant sandalwood fan, and handed it to Knobby Yang. Then she snuggled up close to him and begged:

"Fan me, won't you?"

Knobby Yang was beside himself. He grabbed the fan and started waving it so vigorously that he broke it. This sent Aicheng into fits of laughter. She collapsed over the table, holding her sides, and shrieked: "Aiya! I shall die of laughing!" She threw back her head and roared with laughter. A folk song goes: "Laughter makes for love!" And this whore knew this quite well. With her laughing, her dimpled hands and the tricks she had learned to use on the Japanese, Tamori Taro, she was now angling for Knobby Yang. He suddenly dropped the fan, and made an abrupt lunge at her. She dodged him skilfully, stopped laughing, and asked icily:

"What are you doing? Are you mad? What's the idea?"

This only excited him the more, and he seized her by the arms. She let out a piercing shriek.

"Help! Ma, come quick! Murder!"

She cried her loudest and sobbed. The next instant, bang! the door was flung open, and in rushed Han's wife and concubine.

The wife yelped:

"What's the matter?"

The concubine shrieked:

"What's happened?"

Knobby Yang let go of the girl so quickly, she fell back, knocking over the table, sweeping off all the bowls and dishes, food and soup, wine and wineglasses, bean sauce and bean condiment, jam and pickles, shallot and ginger, noodles and dumplings, sour cabbage and sweet cabbage. These things spilled all over the *kang* and the floor, and soiled the clothes of the couple on the *kang*. The smell was something extraordinary. Even Han's wife and concubine came in for a share.

A crowd of people started gathering in and outside the room—men, women and children who lived in Han's compound—making the confusion worse confounded. Aicheng clambered off the *kang*, threw herself into her mother's arms, and began sobbing and whining, but without tears, drumming her bare feet on the floor. She had had no time to put on her shoes.

"Ma!" she screamed, then sobbed again. Knobby Yang also got down, looking dazed, and started making for the door, but it was blocked by the crowd.

"Where are you off to?" Han's wife passed her daughter to the concubine, and threw herself upon Knobby Yang. She scratched his face, tore his hair, and yanked his clothes, at the same time cursing:

"You've ruined my daughter! You broke into her room in the dead of night and raped her! You're a big man stuffed with the guts of a dog. She's only a child of nineteen, just blossoming. How can she ever get

married after what you've done to her?" The mother made her daughter five years younger than she was. "You deserve to be shot!" she added

"Aiya! Ma!" Aicheng continued shrilling in support of her mother who was ramming, scratching, cursing away.

You deserve to be hacked to pieces!" put in the concubine.

Just then the crowd squeezed sideways to make room for Han himself to sally in, followed by his henchman Li. His daughter rushed into his arms and cried: "Pa!"

"You deserve to be shot!" shouted Han's wife again, stabbing at Knobby Yang's left cheek with her right fingers.

"You deserve to be hacked to pieces!" screamed the concubine again, stabbing at Knobby Yang's right cheek with her left fingers.

"Aiya! Pa! How can I face people again!" sobbed Aicheng, but without shedding tears.

"What!" exclaimed Han, and stopped short, as if struck dumb. Then the four of them raised their voices in concert. Finally the landlord said with slow deliberation:

"I treated you as if you were a man. You ate my dinner, you beast, and raped my daughter. Do you realize what a crime you've committed?" He paused and glared at Knobby Yang, then shouted:

"Where's Li?"

"Here!" his henchman answered, and stepped out from behind him.

"Tie him up and send him over to the work team. If they refuse to take the case, send him to the village office, and if they refuse, send him to the county court. He's gone too far. This is an outrage!" Having said this, Han sailed into the outer room. Bodyguard Li and the cook tied Knobby up with a hemp rope and pushed him into the outer room. The landlord was sitting in state on the edge of the *kang*, where he had twice entertained Knobby with wine. Now he was sitting in judgment there. Knobby stood before him to receive his sentence.

"Now tell me yourself what punishment you deserve for raping my daughter?" Han asked, brandishing the big stick he had used so often under the "Manchukuo" regime.

Knobby Yang did not know what to say.

"Open your damned mouth!" shouted Bodyguard Li from behind.

"I'm sorry I had a bit too much to drink—" started Knobby, when Han interrupted him to say to the lookers-on:

"You people all go to bed." He turned to his wife and concubine: "You go too." And to his daughter: "Child, go back to your room and rest. It's very late. Don't grieve any more. I'll get even with him for you. Go along now, there's a good girl."

When everybody had gone, he ordered his bodyguard:

"Fetch me pen and paper, to put down his confession." The henchman brought him pen, paper, ink-stick, and ink-slab. He ground the ink-stick on the ink-slab, and his master wrote on the paper. Then Han said:

"Here is his confession in black and white. Read it out to him."

"I, Yang Fu-yuan, broke into the Han house at midnight, came upon Han's daughter, and tried to rape her. When she refused, I threw her down on the 'kang' and kissed her. This is a true statement of the fact"

Knobby Yang protested:

"But I didn't kiss her."

"Dare you deny it?" Han boomed, brandishing his big stick, and Knobby was frightened into submission.

"Now tell me how you would like the matter settled—the rough way or the smooth way?"

"Please explain the two ways."

"Just put your mark on this confession, that's the smooth way." Knobby Yang made haste to choose the smooth way by dipping his finger in the ink and stamping his finger-print on the paper. Folding the paper and shoving it into his pocket, Han ordered Li:

"Untie him, and then go back to your quarters."

The henchman and the cook left. All was quiet again in the Han mansion except for some people snoring, the horses chewing mash, and the geese cackling at intervals.

Smoking a cigarette, Han said slowly:

"You and I are in the same boat now." He paused, cast a sidelong glance at Yang, and asked: "Have you got wind of anything?"

"No, nothing," said Knobby.

"The Eighth Route Army in Harbin is going east, one trainload after another. To the frontiers! Didn't I tell you, 'They won't stay long.' Now my words have come true. Listen—the Kuomintang army will stage a comeback after the Moon Festival, if not before."

"The Kuomintang army can't get up here," said Knobby.

"Who says so? Don't listen to them. My son has written me," lied Han, knowing in his heart that Chiang Kai-shek had been beaten.

"What does your son say in his letter?"

"He says," threatened the landlord, "Let them take our house and land, and we shall take their heads." Seeing Yang quail, he added: "Don't you worry. We've known each other all these years, and I'll protect you. From now on, don't get mixed up with the political workers—don't let yourself be taken in by them. That fellow Hsiao is like a man with a hedgehog in his hands—he can neither hold it nor shake it off. He wants to fight me. See if he can! Three times already, and I'm safe and sound. Another three times, and I shall still be better off than you. If you don't believe me, just wait and see." The cock was crowing. Han waxed more intimate and confidential. "You help me now, and I'll help you later. There have been a lot of meetings recently. What are they up to? If you'll find out and report to me, I'll help you out of any difficulties you have. Soon Aicheng's going to make you a new suit. Do you like dark material? I've a good dark material ready. And my daughter can't stay with her parents forever; sometime she'll have to

marry. She may not be able to make up her mind right now about you, but we'll talk to her, and I'm sure she'll come round "

"Landlord Han, you're too good to me!" Knobby answered, thinking of Aicheng's plump hands "I'll do anything you ask."

"Good" said Han "You go home now. It's nearly dawn. If you have news, get in touch with my nephew, and he'll relay it to me."

XVI

By threats, enticement and coercion, Landlord Han had secured the rag and bones dealer as his agent. He planned to use Knobby Yang to get information about the Peasants' Union and the work team. But he was to be sadly disappointed. The Peasants' Union soon found out about Knobby's visits to the landlord, how he had drunk with Han's daughter and got into a fight, and how Han had flattered him. A meeting was called at which Knobby Yang was relieved of his duties on the land distribution committee and expelled from the union. At the same time it was established that Young Chang had no gun—that had all been a lie—so he was restored to membership in the union, and put in charge of the discussion group Knobby Yang had formerly led.

The political workers approved of Chang's appointment, but suggested that he should be criticized for his failure to report to the Peasants' Union after he had seen Knobby Yang carousing with Han the first time.

Knobby Yang had become the talk of the village. Chao observed: "He eats our food and crawls over to the enemy. He's lucky to have got off so lightly." "It makes me sick just to see him," said Kuo. "He's a spineless worm," was Big Li's comment. And Pai said: "He used to go in for rags and bones, now he goes in for whores" All laughed.

When Carter Sun met Knobby Yang on the road he hailed him with a broad grin: "Hi, Chairman Yang, where are you going?" And as Knobby turned his back on him, the old carter jeered in an undertone: "Look at that so-called chairman—Landlord Han's running dog!"

Even Middle Peasant Liu, who had formerly wanted to keep in with both sides, wise-cracked: "He's swelling from Tamori Taro's slop-basin. What an appetite!"

Knobby Yang found it too hot for him in Yuanmao, so he sneaked to a neighbouring village to sell cats' pelts. People soon forgot him, as if he had died.

Landlord Han was at his wit's end. Long-neck Han and Li Chen-chiang had lost much of their usefulness, and now Knobby Yang had gone too. Discussion groups spread, but he had no idea what they were discussing. Were they still out to get him? He was completely in the dark. He slept little at night, often getting up to gaze through the window at the empty courtyard, silent except for horses chewing their mash

"The Kuomintang army will never get here," he thought. After turning things over in his mind for a long time, he finally decided to cache the remainder of his valuables. At night, by the piles of firewood under his courtyard wall, picks could be heard striking against stone.

Han's heavily loaded horses, their hooves wrapped in cotton pads, were driven out of the village by Bodyguard Li and others. But this too came to the ears of the Peasants' Union shortly afterwards, and Pai posted two men, armed with the new spears, to keep close watch outside the Han mansion day and night. The landlord could no longer move his horses and portable property away.

How did the Peasants' Union know what was going on in his house? That was something he could not understand. In fact, it was because the Peasants' Union had won the confidence of the masses, and he and his running dogs were being watched by the peasants.

Han's swineherd, Wu, was thirteen years old. It was he whom Kuo and Big Li had heard Han and his nephew discussing not long before this. One day this little swineherd was driving a drove of pigs homeward, swinging a switch twice his own length, when Kuo came down the road. They started talking and Kuo asked him to join his discussion group.

That very night, after the Han house had gone to bed, Swineherd Wu slid quietly off the *kang*, tiptoed across the courtyard, opened the wicket-gate, and was off to the meeting. There he poured out his bitterness. After the death of his father, Landlord Han had seized his mother. But in less than a year he had tired of her and sold her to a brothel in Shuangcheng. The little boy had tended the landlord's pigs for four years, forbidden to leave. The previous year he had wanted to leave, but Han had told him: "You can't go till you've repaid me the money I spent on your father's coffin. A father's debt must be paid by his son. Tend my pigs for five more years, and then I'll see about it."

When he finished, Swineherd Wu was on the verge of tears. He tugged at Kuo's arm and said:

"Big Brother Kuo, save me. . . ."

"Don't worry. From now on we won't let you suffer again," Kuo promised.

Thenceforth Swineherd Wu slipped out every night and reported to the discussion group all that was going on in the landlord's house. This was how the Peasants' Union had come to know of Knobby Yang's visits to Han and the transfer of the latter's goods and chattels. After joining this group, Wu's thin face was often lit up by a smile.

In all his four years in Han's house, the little swineherd had not known a happy moment. Thirteen years old, he looked only ten; because of his hard life he was nothing but skin and bones. All by himself he had to look after over twenty pigs and a number of sucklings. When he returned in the evening he ate cold left-overs, and this went on day after day, year after year. He slept with the other hired hands in a

shed where hay was stored, adjoining the pigsty. The place stank, and the stench attracted mosquitoes—he was often kept awake all night by their bites. In winter he had no bedding and woke up several times during the night shivering. The Han family never spoke to him except to curse him, and the bodyguard often beat him. Now as he told his story, he sobbed, and many women and children were moved to tears.

The small group meetings had been going on for about a fortnight, and Han was worrying about the situation. One night, unable to sleep, he was pacing the courtyard, when he heard dogs barking in the distance, and the sound of many footsteps. His dogs joined the chorus, as the footsteps drew nearer. Han quickly withdrew under the eaves of the west wing and watched the gateway. He saw the wicket-door open and a figure flit in. By the light of the stars he could see it was Swineherd Wu. Now he lunged forward and caught the boy by the arm, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Li, come quick! Thief! Thief!"

The henchman rushed out, stick in hand.

They dragged the boy into the east wing. Han plumped down on the edge of the *kang* and asked, panting:

"Where have you been?"

"None of your business," shouted the boy, surprised at his own courage.

"Hum! So you're putting on airs too!" said Li, outraged to find that the little swineherd who usually cowered before his stick now dared to wag his tongue and defy even the master. Li lifted the stick and boomed. "If it's not the master's business, it's the business of this stick!" The stick came down with a thump on the back of the recoiling boy.

"Stop!" Han ordered, trying to suppress his anger. "Let him say what happened at the discussion group. If he does, we'll spare him."

"I won't tell you anything, not even if you kill me." The little swineherd tossed up his head defiantly.

Han's face reddened and his neck swelled:

"So you want to stand up, do you? I'll teach you to stand up! Yank off his clothes, Li, while I fetch the whip."

Pinned to the ground, the boy screamed: "Help! Landlord Han is killing me!"

Li hastily gagged him by ramming a rag into his mouth. It was nearly dawn, and everything was still. Swineherd Wu's cry for help had reached the two militiamen patrolling the road hard by the Han mansion. Now one of them was running toward the Han mansion while the other sprinted down the road, blowing his whistle and crying: "Han's killing someone!"

The little swineherd was lying on the ground, his clothes ripped off. Han planted a foot on his back, thinking: "I may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb." Lifting the whip, he declared:

"I'm going to beat you to death!"

Whack! Whack! Whack! The horsewhip rose and fell, and bloody lines appeared one after another on the boy's bare back and buttocks. The bodyguard added his stick to his master's whip, beating the lad on his head and body. The blood spattered Han's white silk trousers. Soon Swineherd Wu ceased to move. He had fainted. Grinding his teeth, the landlord shouted:

"Go quick and dig a hole in the stable. He wanted to stand up—he'll never stand up again!"

As Li was running across the courtyard, he heard someone hammering on the gate. Presently more and more people could be heard outside. The dogs barked—people had climbed the east wall.

"Run, Landlord Han!" cried Li. He himself darted to the backyard, changed his mind, ran back to drag a ladder to the backyard, and leaned it against the wall. When he got to the top of the wall, he half jumped half fell into the ditch on the other side. Then getting quickly to his feet, he ran through an elm grove into a vegetable garden, trampling upon gourd and bean vines, and through it into a willow grove, until he reached Long-neck Han's house.

The whole village was agog. The sun was reddening the clouds above the horizon, and the cocks were crowing. Villagers ran toward the Han mansion by different routes—across the highway, over the fields, through vegetable gardens, from behind woodstacks, around wheat ricks. Some brought with them hoes, axes, pokers. Some had picked up elm shoots and willow switches from the woodstacks on the way. Men, women, old women and children were converging on the road leading to the Han mansion. They formed a human torrent; the sun behind them lighting up their shining, shaved heads and tattered grey felt hats, as they surged forward like a tidal wave.

Running at the head were Chao and Pai, followed by the newly-formed militia armed with newly-forged spears. They reached the great gateway and pounded on the huge black door, but it remained shut. Then they dashed to the wall on the east side. They looked up—the wall was over twenty feet high, they could not climb it. Chao handed his rifle to Pai, and ran with a militiaman to a nearby house for a ladder.

Soon they had hauled a big pine log over and leaned it against the wall. Chao climbed up to the top, and leaped down into the backyard. Four great dogs rushed at him, baying. Back against the wall, he stooped to pick up a stone and hit the first one on the head. It yelped in pain and turned tail, holding the other three off effectively. In his jump Chao had twisted his leg, but now he hobbled quickly to the gate and unbolted it. People outside, including Team Leader Hsiao, Little Wang, Liu Sheng, and the armed guards, burst into the mansion.

Chao took back his rifle from Pai, mounted the bayonet and rushed into the courtyard, followed by Pai, Kuo and the militiamen. Bayonets and spearheads with red tassels were glittering in the morning sun. While Pai and the militiamen threw a cordon around the north wing,

Chao and Kuo rushed into the east wing, where they nearly tripped over a figure lying on the floor beside the *kang*. It was Swineherd Wu. When Chao bent down and stretched out a hand, he was taken aback at the touch of the warm blood. The boy was lying in a pool of blood. He felt his heart still beating, and said, "He's still alive. Come on, let's lift him onto the *kang*."

In lifting the boy, Chao and Kuo got blood all over their hands. The people who had followed them in stood aghast. Then, from among the crowd, Team Leader Hsiao shouted:

"Catch the murderer! Quick! Don't let him escape!"

This roused Chao and Kuo, who immediately squeezed through the cluster of people and led a few militiamen into the inner room, where they found the women and children sitting on the *kang* and the men standing before the mirrored wardrobe. They looked at the peasants with hatred in their eyes.

"Where's Landlord Han?" Chao demanded.

"He's out," answered Han's wife briefly.

"Have you brought ropes with you?" Chao asked a militiaman.

"No."

"Go and get some, and tie them all up, quick!"

Chao and Kuo searched the room, flinging open trunks and cabinets and looking into all the corners where a man might be hidden. The trunks were stuffed with clothes and bolts of cloth, but they had no eyes for these in their impatience to find Han. However, though they searched high and low, they could find no trace of him.

"You stay here," Chao told Kuo, "and make them say where he's gone to. Beat them if they won't talk, I'll take the responsibility. I'm going now to search the west wing."

The militiaman brought in ropes, and Kuo proceeded to tie up Han's wife. "Brother Kuo," she whimpered, "be merciful!"

"None of your hypocrisy," he answered.

He got a militiaman to help him tie up Han's wife, then approached the concubine. She suddenly hurled herself to the ground and went into a swoon, whereupon all the other family members cried out: "Aiya! She's dying!" Aicheng began whining without tears. Stupefied, Kuo and the militiamen stopped short. At this moment Carter Sun came in and, sizing up the situation, shouted:

"Get up, you! Don't try any tricks, or I'll beat you! If I beat you to death, that'll be one bad egg the less. Get back, you people, I need room to swing my stick."

Before the old carter had raised his elm sapling, the concubine opened her eyes and got hastily to her feet. She kneeled and begged him:

"Don't hit me! I'm up!"

"Why did you play that trick? Tell me!" he shouted.

"She's ill. That wasn't any trick," the wife answered for her.

"Really she's ill—a woman's illness," Aicheng confirmed.

"I'll kill you!" Carter Sun shouted, this time really lifting the elm stick.

"Aiya! Don't hit me, I'll tell you—I'll tell you, Uncle," cried the concubine, covering her face with both her hands.

"Don't uncle me—it'll be ill luck to be uncled by you. Hurry up and tell me." He threw away the stick.

"I took a drug, an overdose."

"I knew it! I'm fifty this year and I've travelled up and down these parts. Think I don't know all your tricks?" the carter declared, chuckling.

"Where's Landlord Han?" asked Kuo. "Tell us quick."

"I really don't know!" The concubine tried hard to sound pathetic.

More and more people came into the outer room. Team Leader Hsiao had sent Little Wang for medical aid, and he was not back yet. The little swineherd was lying on his face, with red and purple welts across his back, his limbs and head gashed and bleeding as if somebody had slashed him with a knife. Blood was still flowing from his wounds. Old Tien came forward, and when he saw the boy he shed tears, recalling the tragedy of his own daughter, an earlier victim of Han's. He felt as if this was his own child before him, and took off his tattered jacket to spread over the mangled boy, when Team Leader Hsiao stopped him, saying:

"No hurry, Old Tien. Let people see."

Little Wang brought in some ointment and bandages, and carefully administered first aid. Chao squeezed into the room and reported to Team Leader Hsiao, gasping: "Han has escaped!"

"He has?" The team leader started at this report but, after a moment's reflection, answered calmly:

"He can't have gone far. Go quickly and search in all directions." He stepped out into the courtyard and divided the guards, the militiamen, and the activists into five search parties. They immediately looked in the servants' quarters, mill, beancurd room, lumber room, stable, pigsty, and woodpile, in every nook and corner. There was no trace of Han except for a ladder leaning against the west wall. He must have climbed over the wall, and escaped! Team Leader Hsiao hurried around to the outside and found on the ground near the ditch below the wall two different sets of footprints embedded in the soft mud—one the imprint of a rubber sole and the other of a cloth sole. He followed the footprints to the east end of the ditch, where the rubber sole branched northward and the cloth sole southward. He paused there and thought a while, then walked on northward with Chao and Wan.

"Run and fetch three horses from the courtyard," he told Wan, then asked Chao: "Can you ride bareback?"

"Sure."

"Good. Then there's no need to saddle the horses. Be quick, Old Wan," Pai had caught up with them, and Hsiao said to him:

"Pai, you give chase southward—Kuo eastward—Big Li westward. Take several guards along, each of you. And go on horseback. You must find him. Tell them these are my orders." He pulled out a pocket-book, tore off a page, and scribbled in pencil: "Squad Leader Chang, order armed guards to go with Kuo, Pai and Big Li out of the east, south, and west gates in pursuit of Han. You take two guards and help Young Chang and the militiamen keep watch in the village and look out for the criminal. Hsiao."

Hsiao then turned to Chao, and said with a grin:

"Here's your chance to show your marksmanship, Old Chao. Have you fired a rifle before?"

"Sure, I'm not too bad a shot," said Chao.

"Good. If he attempts to run, shoot him." Team Leader Hsiao turned around and saw Wan approaching on horseback, leading two other horses. He called to him:

"Old Wan, get a move on! Gallop!"

Wan dug his heels into the horse's sides and galloped like the wind. The roadside geese fled in fright, cackling, flapping their great snow-white wings. The pigs and sheep rammed their heads into the cracks in the fences of vegetable gardens. The horses' hooves seemed scarcely to touch the ground as they flew forward. But still Team Leader Hsiao was shouting: "Faster! Faster!"

In another instant, Wan caught up with Team Leader Hsiao and Chao who immediately vaulted upon the horses. Together they galloped on. Without turning, Hsiao called out: "Take out your gun, Old Wan. Watch the footprints, follow in their track."

They rode out through the north gate and reached the river. All the way the footprints were visible in the mud and in the ruts. But when they crossed the bridge the tracks turned aside and vanished!

"No more footprints!" Team Leader Hsiao ejaculated.

"The wind's high along the river. It's dried the road, so footprints can't be seen," said Chao, scanning the path beside the river.

Team Leader Hsiao looked over the river and the two banks under the sultry sun. Some of the willow leaves were fading; the reeds on the river banks were half green, half yellow; the red tassels of the Indian corn were beginning to wither; the kaoliang was a deep red. It was high autumn weather. "He may be hiding in the fields," thought Hsiao. "We must be careful."

"Look out, you fellows. Watch the fields."

They came to a point where two paths forked out. One went toward Yenshao, a town in the north, where another work team had been sent. The other path ran along the river bank toward the west. Which way had Han gone? There were no more footprints. The pursuers did not know which way to go. Team Leader Hsiao pulled up his horse to consider the matter. "He can't have chosen a place where there's another work team," he thought. He spurred forward again along the river

bank. The clear water of the river reflected upside-down the shadows of the men and galloping horses. On the bank in front of them they saw a man standing on a springboard, smoking a pipe, adjusting a net suspended from a trestle. At the approach of the horsemen, the fisherman turned around and greeted them with a smile:

"Where are you off to, Chairman Chao?"

Seeing it was Old Chu, a member of the Peasants' Union, Chao dismounted at once and asked:

"Old Chu, did you see Landlord Han passing by here a while ago?"

"No, I didn't," he answered, beckoning Chao to come nearer. "Come and have a look at the big dog-fish I've caught today!"

Chao handed Wan the reins and stepped onto the springboard. Old Chu whispered to him: "Look in the fish shed over there, under the straw."

Chao jumped off the springboard, levelled his gun, and sprinted toward the small shed not far from the bank. He burst in and parted the straw on the ground with the muzzle of the gun. A big head with a receding hair line showed through the damp, yellow straw. This head tried to wriggle back into hiding again. Here at last was the enemy of the people of Yuanmao who had so nearly escaped. 'Burning with anger, Chao rammed the rifle-butt down on Han's arm, cursing:

"Bastard! Where do you think you can fly to? To the sky?"

Team Leader Hsiao and Wan entered the shed, ducking their heads at the entrance.

They found a rope in one corner, bound the landlord hand and foot, loaded him onto Wan's black horse, tied him to it astride, and then headed back slowly for the village.

"I'm coming too," said Old Chu. He drew in his net, collected his fish, and poured them into two baskets suspended on the two ends of a bamboo, which he flung across his shoulder. Then he hurried after the others.

"Isn't this a big fish!" Old Chu said with a grin. "But it has to be very carefully handled—it bites terribly." He pulled out of his pocket a silver dollar and added: "Look! What's this?" He showed the coin to Team Leader Hsiao and Chao and explained: "Landlord Han came running up, all in a sweat, and asked to hide in the shed. He gave me this silver dollar, and told me not to let on."

"Why, then, did you tell us?" Team Leader Hsiao asked, smiling.

"I'm a member of the Peasants' Union—how could I hide a landlord and local despot? Serves him right for coming this way!"

"He couldn't have got away, whatever way he'd run," Chao observed.

At this moment a crowd of people came marching down the road, the red tassels on their spears waving, and with Little Wang and Liu Sheng at their head. They had been afraid that Team Leader Hsiao might run into bandits, so the villagers had volunteered to come in support.

When they saw the landlord had been caught, they clustered around him, raising their sticks and spears. But Chao stopped them, saying: "Wait. We'll take him back and give him a public trial. We'll let all the villagers take their revenge."

But the angry peasants were not to be stopped. They blocked the road, so the horses could not proceed.

Chao, Team Leader Hsiao, Little Wang, and Liu Sheng laid their heads together and decided that Han must be taken back to the village for trial. Chao vaulted onto a horse and declared at the top of his voice:

"Clear the way, please. We must take him back and hold a mass meeting. Not everybody's here. Landlord Han's the enemy of all the people of Yuanmao. All the people of Yuanmao want to get even with him. We want to avenge ourselves, so do they. Let's go back and hold a big meeting."

"What if he escapes again?" a voice asked.

"Just let him try!" said Chao.

At that the crowd fell back. As the mare carrying Han passed through, people struck out angrily at him with their sticks.

The search parties led by Big Li, Kuo and Pai came back to the village at sunset in dejection because they had not found Han. But when they heard he had been caught, they were overjoyed. They rushed into the playground where he was, and showered blows on him.

"Bastard! Leading us such a dance!" they cursed. Han was locked up. More than twenty villagers volunteered to stand on watch day and night around the shack where he was held.

Team Leader Hsiao's first words when he got back to the schoolhouse were: "How is the little swineherd?"

"He has been sent to the county hospital," Little Wang told him.

Acting on the suggestion of the Peasants' Union, Team Leader Hsiao had all Han's family put under house arrest. The militia were ordered to guard his property and livestock, and the Peasants' Union sealed up the trunks, cases and cabinets. These things would be disposed of after a mass meeting.

Meanwhile, Long-neck Han and Bodyguard Li had made good their escape. This was the only thing that maired the general joy.

XVII

The news of Han's recapture stirred the whole village. During the last fortnight, in their small group meetings the villagers had shed their former fears and acquired a new political consciousness and courage to carry on the struggle. More and more activists were appearing—they

were like torches kindling fires everywhere. Han's cruelty to the little swineherd was merely another small instalment in a long series of crimes, but, now that the masses had been awakened, it was enough to ignite a great fire of hatred and revenge.

The flames were blazing higher and higher, up to the skies, burning down the feudalism which had obstructed China's progress for thousands of years, giving birth to a new society. The wrongs which the peasantry had suffered from generation to generation were the fuel for the fire.

On the evening of Han's recapture, the political workers and the Peasants' Union called a meeting of activists in Chao's vegetable garden, under the gourd trellis, to prepare for the mass meeting. The little white gourd blossoms amid the green leaves were particularly beautiful in the setting sun. Team Leader Hsiao prompted the activists to give their own ideas as to how the struggle should be organized.

Everybody put in a word and soon a lively discussion was on. Sometimes several people, or even several groups, tried to make themselves heard at the same time. There was a regular din.

Chao, who was presiding over the meeting, called out: "Don't all speak at the same time! Take your turn."

"Han must be bound tight," Pai suggested. "If he's let loose, the villagers may wonder what we're up to again."

"Old Sun, it's your turn now," said Chao to the carter.

"All the bitches in the Han family should be tied up too, and let our women tackle them. One meeting for the men, and one for the women."

"That's no good," said Young Chang. "If you divide the masses, there will be confusion. Let's fight Han first. After the big trunk's felled, the twigs and branches are easy to deal with."

"You must post plenty of guards, Old Pai," warned Kuo. "It's no joking matter. We mustn't allow any disorder. We'll get everybody ill-treated by Han to go up in turn, to state his case, settle accounts and pour out his bitterness. A space must be left in front of Han, so that people can step up and accuse him."

"The accusations should be short," said Big Li. "We don't want people to run on and on. That way there'd be no end. It would take weeks to describe everything Han's done."

"You must be more careful too this time, Old Li," warned Pai. "Don't let Han's running dogs in again."

Old Chu added: "If any running dogs come to the meeting tomorrow, truss them up on the spot. If you can't do it alone, we'll all lend a hand."

After a pause, Pai asked: "Can we beat him?"

"Did he ever beat you?" Chao countered.

"I'll say he did!"

"Well, then, why not pay him back in his own coin?" Chao grinned. Thereupon Pai addressed the whole assembly:

"Tomorrow let's each bring a big stick to the meeting, to accuse Big Stick Han. Pay him back in kind"

After a word with Team Leader Hsiao, Chao announced:

"The meeting is adjourned. Tomorrow we'll hold the trial. Have your breakfast early, and be at the meeting in good time."

"Why wait until tomorrow?" asked Young Chang. "Why not have the mass meeting tonight?"

"When we go back now, we'll call another meeting of the discussion groups, so that the villagers will be well prepared. Tomorrow we've got to get Han down," Chao answered. He turned to Team Leader Hsiao and asked: "Have you anything to say to us, Team Leader?"

"You've all made good suggestions," said Hsiao. "Now we'll go back and think them over again. I wonder if you should elect a presidium for tomorrow? Can't think of anything else."

After the meeting, the activists went back and hastily called their small groups together. Some of them broke up when it was dark. All the peasants prepared sticks. Some of the meetings went on till midnight. Due to the fact that they were organized and had a core of reliable workers, after discussion and preparation the poor peasants were no longer afraid. The biggest change was in Carter Sun, who headed one group. He no longer said that he did not want to be an activist, and had rallied around him not only old carters like himself but also poor youngsters. He was as garrulous as ever and made a speech to his small group, using many of the new political terms.

"We're all activists," he said, "and activists are brave fellows who forge ahead through difficulties and never back out. How could we lead the masses otherwise? You tell me, is that right or not?"

"Right!" his men responded together.

"Are we or are we not travelling the revolutionary road? If we are, and the revolution's just going to succeed, how can we still be afraid of wolves in front and tigers behind? What ideology is that?"

Under his influence, all the men in his group prepared to speak out in the fourth struggle against Han the next day.

The next morning it was a bright, late autumn day. The sky was a limpid blue, the wind had dried the ground, and the wind-blown fields presented a motley of colours. The kaoliang was yellow. The red stalks of buckwheat were topped with little white blossoms as if sprinkled with snow or frost. A few crimson tassels still hung from odd plants of Indian corn that had ripened late, but most of the tassels in the ears of corn had withered. The thick bean leaves looked like so many yellow blotches from the distance. Before the windows and under the eaves of the peasants' huts hung strings of red chillies, clusters of sloes, red turnips, and ripe ears of Indian corn. The cottage eaves were as colourful as the plain.

The peasants were doubly happy at the prospect of a good harvest and the overthrow of Landlord Han.

At the crack of dawn, the villagers streamed in groups to the Han mansion, swinging sticks in their hands. By the time it was really light, the courtyard was filled to overflowing. People sat on the wall, on top of the gatehouse, on Indian corn stacks, on window sills and on the roofs.

Women and children were singing a newly composed song, set to a folk tune:

The wrongs, the hate of a thousand years,

Can be avenged, now the Party's here!

Landlord Han! Landlord Han!

The people are out for your blood!

At first only the women and children sang, then youngsters joined in. Soon more voices had swelled the chorus, and even Carter Sun was singing. Then the village band struck up! Old Chu was beating a big drum and other men were sounding gongs and striking cymbals.

"He's coming! He's coming!" When this cry went up, all eyes turned to the gateway. People longed to go out and see, but no one could move for the crowd.

Four militiamen had brought Han from the prison to the mass meeting. The streets on the way were lined with militiamen. There were sentries even in the turrets of his mansion. He was overawed by this display of the people's power. Children skipped behind the landlord, while a few ran on ahead to the Han mansion to proclaim:

"Here he comes! Here he comes!"

With a rifle slung across his shoulder, Pai was patrolling the road. He told the men in the turrets to watch the fields around lest Long-neck Han and Bodyguard Li bring Han's younger brother and his bandits to his rescue.

Pai had had so much work and anxiety lately, he had lost a lot of weight. He had changed his lazy ways too, and was always on the run. On the night before the mass meeting he came home in the small hours. When he lay down on the *kang*, his wife woke up and, rubbing her eyes, asked him:

"Some steamed bread in the pot. Do you want some?"

"No, I don't want any," he answered. "Landlord Han's going to be tried tomorrow. You go too." He was unable to keep his eyes open.

"What should a woman go for?" she asked.

"Don't you want to avenge Little Button's death?" he said, then began snoring.

"I daren't speak at a big meeting. I should dry up after a few words."

But no answer came from the other side of the *kang*. Mrs. Pai fell to recalling the tragic death of Little Button again. At sunrise she wakened Pai, and left for the meeting place after him. She didn't want to miss the excitement. She found many women standing together

by the wall. She joined Mrs. Chao and Old Tien's blind wife, and began chatting with them.

When Landlord Han reached the platform in the middle of the courtyard, shouts went up on all sides. Chao blew his whistle and cried:

"Order, please! No small meetings now! Take your places properly. Today is our struggle against that traitor, Landlord Han. Now's the time for us poor men to speak out and take vengeance. You can come up one by one to settle scores."

A young man with a spear in one hand and a stout stick in the other ran up to Han. He glared at the landlord, then turned to face the people. It was Young Chang.

"Landlord Han is my mortal enemy. In 1941, he refused to pay my wages after I'd worked as his farmhand for a year. Instead he had me sent for forced labour. When I ran away, he put my mother in prison, and there she died. Today I want to avenge my mother's death. Can I beat him?"

"Go ahead!"

"Beat him to death!"

From all sides the shouts thundered. The peasants raised the sticks and spears in their hands, and surged forward. The militiamen held their spears horizontally to stop them, but the crowd burst through. Han took in the situation, and the moment Chang lifted his stick, he collapsed to the ground. Chao saw through his trick, and shouted:

"You fraud! You fell down before the stick had touched you."

A whole forest of sticks were raised. The situation was getting out of hand. Some blows fell on the wrong heads and backs. Carter Sun's tattered felt hat was knocked off and trampled underfoot. When he stretched out his hand for it, he caught a blow on the arm.

An old woman was hit on the leg, but she said nothing. The villagers were so filled with hatred for Han they felt no resentment over blows received by mistake. Chao boomed:

"Drag him up. Let someone else accuse him!"

The big head with bald temples was hoisted up from the ground. A middle-aged woman in a patched and repatched blue jacket came up and, brandishing a stick over Han's head, accused him:

"You—you killed my boy!"

The stick fell on Han's shoulder, but when she wanted to strike again, she had no strength in her arm. She dropped the stick, threw herself upon him and bit his shoulder and arm, not knowing how to vent her hate. When she mentioned her son she started weeping. Other women, especially the older ones, cried in sympathy, for they knew her. This was Widow Chang. In 1939, her only son had married. A month later Landlord Han saw the bride was pretty, and started paying them daily visits. The young husband saw red, and one day he grabbed a kitchen knife to have it out with him. But the landlord took to his heels, declaring: "Fine! Just wait!" That same night, the son was sent

off to a labour camp, where he was strangled to death by the Japanese military at Han's request. Han then forced the young widow to live with him, and when he tired of her sold her to a brothel.

In grief and anger Widow Chang shouted:

"Give back my boy!"

She rushed forward, and the others surged after her. The women wanted their husbands and sons. The men wanted their fathers and brothers. Sobs mingled with curses. Little Wang wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. From time to time Team Leader Hsiao told Liu Sheng:

"Put it on record—another murder by him."

One accusation followed another. Toward evening, the record in Liu Sheng's notebook showed seventeen murders including Kuo's father frozen to death, Chao's daughter starved to death, Pai's Little Button hurled to death, and Old Tien's daughter flogged to death. Then there were forty-three women who had been raped or carried off only to be sold when Han and his son tired of them. When these figures were announced, there was no preventing the people from taking their revenge. A forest of sticks waved in the air, and came down on Han.

"Beat him to death! Beat him to death!" somebody shouted.

"Don't let him live another day!" roared another angry voice.

"Let him pay with his life!"

"Tear him to pieces or I won't be avenged!" cried Old Tien's wife in a quavering voice.

Mrs. Pai wanted to help the old woman squeeze to the front to beat Han, but it was no use. They were knocked down by the crowd. The younger woman quickly scrambled to her feet, hoisted up the older one, and steered her out of harm's way.

The accusations went on. Han—traitor, local despot and feudal landlord—was now known to have killed seventeen persons, while there were many others whom he had murdered secretly. He had taken men from every poor family for unpaid labour in his house. He charged such high rent, all his tenants—except for running dogs like Li Chen-chiang—found themselves ruined at the end of the year, and had to give him free labour, fodder and seeds, and make over their horses to him to make up the rent. He never paid his farmhands. They were lucky if they worked for him for a year and got three or four catties of pork at New Year. Any he took a dislike to, he got rid of by asking Tamori Taro, the Japanese gendarme who lived in his house, to send to labour camps. And very few who went ever came back. He had made his poor neighbours sink a well, but forbade them to take water from it unless they worked for him. He had imprisoned people whose pigs had strayed into his vegetable gardens and trampled one blade of grass. His land holdings amounted to over ten thousand *mou*, of which he had inherited one thousand—all the rest had been acquired by foul means.

The villagers were not interested in such accusations, however. "We know all that," they said. "He's never done a good thing in his life, but he's had a hand in everything bad." Then they shouted: "We won't break up, we won't go home, we won't have supper tonight, unless he dies today!"

Team Leader Hsiao got a telephone message through to the county government and asked for instructions. Meanwhile, Liu Sheng gave the villagers some further information: In 1935 Han had killed nine members of the United Anti-Japanese Army at Hsiaoshantze. After the Japanese surrender, he had been made chief of staff of the reactionary Kuomintang troops under the command of the gangster Pei Lai and concurrently Kuomintang secretary general and interim administrative head for Yuanmao. He had led bandits against the United Democratic Army and killed another patriot.

"Ten more lives," said Tien. "That makes twenty-seven men he murdered!"

"Wipe out the Kuomintang bandits! Down with Chiang Kai-shek and his gang!" Little Wang shouted, raising his right arm, and over a thousand voices shouted with him.

Team Leader Hsiao came back, stood before the platform, and announced:

"The county government agrees with the people of Yuanmao that a murderer should forfeit his own life."

"Good for the democratic government!" shouted a porter named Hua. "Good for the communist political workers!" Men, women, and children shouted and clapped. The noise was like thunder.

Chao and Pai, carrying their rifles, pushed Han out towards the east gate of the village. Kuo and Big Li followed behind with over a thousand people at their heels. Men and women were shouting slogans, singing songs, blowing trumpets, beating gongs and drums. Old Mrs. Tien, who had lost the sight of both eyes, hobbled along with Mrs. Pai supporting her.

"I've been hoping and crying these three long years for a day like this," sobbed the old woman. "Under Chairman Mao and the Communist Party, my daughter has been avenged!"

Chinese Folk Songs

Ho Chi-fang

I

From one of Gorky's essays we learn that in tsarist Russia the activities of folk artists were forbidden. From the early seventeenth century onward, the church and nobility of old Russia oppressed wandering players, and ordered all peasants who dared sing their songs to be cruelly flogged. As late as the eighteen-thirties a blacksmith was flogged for singing. The former rulers of China followed a similar policy. All songs from the *yangko* (sowing songs) of the north to the drum dances of the south were alike forbidden by the old officials, who in some places even sent bailiffs to arrest offenders, a practice that was known as "arresting drum dancers." During the Manchu dynasty the district officers of the Tunglan district in Kwangsi Province arrested girls who were fond of singing, and had their faces varnished by way of punishment. But instead of silencing the singing there, this only elicited the following song of protest:

*The big stars in the sky rule over the small,
On earth the provincial governors rule over the military,
The prefects rule over the magistrates,
But why should they rule over us singers?*

Gorky does not tell us why the church and nobility of old Russia were so hostile to folk artists and their art, only mentioning that these minstrels sang of the "Age of Great Rebellion," and of stories of the leaders of peasant revolts, Ivan Borodnikov and Stepan Razin. The charge levelled by past rulers of China against folk drama and folk songs was always that of "immorality."

Feudalism has had an exceptionally long history in China, peasant revolts here occurring more frequently and on a larger scale than anywhere else in the world. However, apart from the famous novel *Water Margin*, very little other folk literature on the peasant revolts exists today. On the contrary, many folk plays contain ideas derived from the feudal ruling class. For example, among the old *yangko* plays of Tingsien, we find some, such as *Kuo Chu Buries His Son*, which praise feudal morality and are based on *Tales of the Twenty-four Cases of Filial Piety*. However, the rulers of the old society still considered them "improper," and had them banned. This was, in our view, no accident, but due mainly to the fact that they could still detect in these plays the working class "coarseness" which they detested. Yet no matter how

strict the rule of feudal thought, the folk artists could never be kept completely subservient. Thus in the old *yangko* plays of Tingsien we find on the one hand praise of filial sons and faithful wives compiled according to the canons of the feudal ruling class, and on the other hand daughters who reproach their fathers; while the question of whether or not a good woman may remarry appears debatable. There are characters like "good officers" and "squires"; yet these people are exposed to ridicule. In fact, in one and the same play we see the first emperor of the Ming dynasty still as a poor man, when a dragon¹ appeared above his head and women sued for his favour; yet a slave girl dared to speak of his "dragon favour" as "donkey favour" or "ox favour." At all events, although judged by present day criteria very few of these *yangko* attain a high standard as regards content, even such inferior writings evince a contempt for the "holy order" and rules of the feudal ruling class.

The complex, contradictory nature of folk literature has given rise to very divergent criticisms. Some critics, noting the feudal thought assimilated, stress its backwardness and conservatism, others, realising that basically it represents the ideology of the working people, pass a most favourable judgement. Since the old folk literature is a product of feudal and semi-feudal society, it would indeed be strange if no trace of the feudal society could be found in it. The main thing, however, is to recognise its fundamental nature. When we speak of folk literature we usually mean peasant literature. Folk songs, folk legends and a number of folk plays were probably composed orally and passed down and preserved orally by the peasants; while other folk plays may originally have had models or scripts which, after being handed down over a long period of time and performed constantly, must also have assumed the character of oral compositions. If our concern is not with certain aspects, but with folk literature as a whole, we should obviously first affirm wherein lies its superiority in content and form.

In our view, folk songs embody more characteristics of the working people than folk plays, and reflect more directly their life and thought, hopes and aspirations. A playwright has more requirements to fulfil than a song-maker, hence it was not always possible to avoid borrowing stories and legends from the feudal ruling class, while sometimes the draft might even be written by a ruling class intellectual. On the other hand folk songs, particularly lyrics, are the easiest form for labourers tied to their tasks. Moreover, since these songs are often the product of overflowing emotion, it is natural that many of them provide a sincere and moving picture of the thoughts of the working people.

¹ According to Chinese mythology dragons are appointed by Heaven. The appearance of a dragon which symbolises royalty, confirms such an appointment.

The conflict between the peasant and the landlord class, which constitutes the chief conflict of feudal society and one of the chief conflicts of semi-feudal society, is directly reflected in folk songs. Although such songs are few, in each locality one can find work describing the life of farmhands. Here is an example from Szechuan:

*Now sunset turns the hill tops red,
Let me sing a rustic song to thank my master.
Every morning two bowls of beancurd dregs,
Every evening beancurd dregs again;
I don't want to work any more for such a master.*

This would appear to be an improvisation by a day-labourer. There is a northern song too describing the life of day-labourers and how they worked from morning to night, yet only earned a hundred coppers. *The Hired Hand's Song* from Nanchang, Kiangsi, and *The Cowherd's Song* from Changting, Fukien, describe the twelve months of the year, and depict the life of long-term labourers as even harder. These songs give a most penetrating exposure of the landlords' exploitation. When accounts are settled at the end of the year all the workers' wages are deducted. The last line of the former song runs: "Go home empty-handed for New Year"; and the last line of the latter: "Instead he owes the master three hundred coins." *The Hired Hand's Song* from Taihsing in Kiangsu, after a similar description of the year-long exploitation and oppression, does not confine itself to a satirical conclusion, but voices a vehement desire:

*The year-labourer
Is oppressed the whole year round;
He can't complain of his bitter lot,
But heaven has eyes and won't let it go unpunished.
May a fire break out in the master's house at midnight!
May his silver be burnt to tin,
His gold to copper!
May he build a hovel by the burial ground
And be reduced to my lot!*

In normal times, since it was very difficult for peasants to realise such desires themselves, they inevitably put their hope in "Heaven" Folk songs of this type generally employ satirical language because, except during periods of peasant revolt, it was extremely difficult for the peasants to translate their anger directly into action. This anger was naturally transformed into biting satire. The North Shensi *Hired Labourer's Song* ingeniously combines satire with anger. When the master breaks a pitcher he says it can still be used, but when the hired labourer breaks a pitcher he gets a box on the ear. The master calls the labourer and says it is already daylight, although in fact it is still

pitch dark. The last verse of this song expresses the bitterness of all long-term labourers:

May my children and grandchildren never work as hired hands!

However, another *Hired Labourer's Song* from North Shensi, taking into account the actual conditions of hired labour in the old society, returns the following cruel answer to the wish expressed above:

You will have to work as a hired hand;

A man has no backbone when he is poor.

We must bear in mind that all these folk songs are products of the old society. At the time they were produced, no industrial proletariat had yet appeared to lead the agrarian movement. Hence, instead of regarding them as disillusioned verses tending to pessimism, we should appreciate the peasants' grasp of the reality of their time, their spirit of revolt and potential strength. This was like a fire smouldering in the dark, which one day under changed conditions would flare up and rage for ten or twenty years, finally culminating in the people's revolutionary war in which the strength of the peasants played a principal part and which liberated all China, expressing the revolutionary spirit evident in the new folk songs produced in the period of land reform, the War of Resistance to Japan, and the War of Liberation.

In addition to direct opposition to the exploitation and oppression of the landlord class, folk songs often express truths only easily apprehended by the labouring people. Two North Shensi *yangko*, *In February Spring Comes* and *January Gives Place to February*, both describe peasants toiling in the fields, whose wives bring food to them. One of the husbands complains about the food: "It's raw on top, cooked at the bottom, and soggy in the middle." The other husband jeers at his wife: "You come without combing your hair or washing your face, walking just like a man." To answer such criticism the authors of the songs made out a very good case for the wives, arguing that since they had to gather firewood, carry water, turn the millstone and look after the children when they cried, they had no time to prepare food carefully or dress neatly. All of which underlines the fact that in the old society only members of the leisured classes could live comfortably or dress well. In North Shensi, Shansi and Hopei a song called *Praising the Wife* was current, which also describes a man scolding his wife for being a slattern. Her hair is tangled as flax and crawling with lice, her clothes are filthy and her trousers in rags. However, when finally he reproaches her for having big hands and feet, the wife is made to retort forcefully:

What does it matter if I have big hands and feet?

I can collect manure and break clods for you.

This is a clear indication of the working class criterion for a wife, totally unlike the criterion of the exploiting class which made playthings of its womenfolk. Another North Shensi song, *Ten Different Things*, appears by its contents to have been composed relatively late, for in it reference is made to telegraph wires, schools, guns, steamers, trains,

cars, aeroplanes, bicycles, rickshaws, machines and so forth. This song shows the wonder and also the complete lack of comprehension with which the peasants regarded these things; however, they recognised one fundamental principle of the old society, for the last lines run:

To make these ten things, they take money from the people.

Every year they ask for money—ours is a sad lot!

A comprehensive estimate should be made of the worth of these folk songs. Those quoted above all give evidence of a high level of thought. By the exploitation of the old society peasants were deprived of their right to culture and learning, being closely bound to the landlord's estate or to their own tiny patch of ground. That they nevertheless attained a clear enough understanding of reality to compose these songs is, therefore, greatly to their credit.

III

It has been said, "Songs are women's literature and women's problem." Of course such a statement is one-sided and inaccurate. However, because in feudal and semi-feudal society the status of toiling women was even lower than that of men and they suffered even greater hardships, there are a number of songs, many of them very moving, describing the suffering of women. These songs occupy an important place among folk songs as a whole.

Feudal society devised a special spiritual bond for women, expressed in such phrases as: "The husband rules the wife," or "The bride must obey her husband." But the labouring women depicted in folk songs often refuse to abide by the customary feudal conventions, and do not submit meekly to unreasonable marriages to husbands like "the seven-year-old boy who becomes a bridegroom at eight" or "the scabby, blear-eyed boy who wets the bed." They resist such marriages. Naturally it was difficult for women in the past, as well as for the past composers of folk songs, to recognise the truth behind this—the truth that the feudal marriage system was the inevitable product of the feudal social system. This is why songs cursing go-betweens were current everywhere, heaping nearly all the hatred of the old marriage system on the go-betweens' heads:

*May the go-between get blisters from walking,
A sore throat from drinking,
Go bald from wearing a hat,*

and

Get skin disease from her clothes!

or

*Stew the go-between's flesh in the pan,
Burn the go-between's bones for fuel,
Use her skin to make a drum!*

Naturally the go-betweens themselves also complained, some of them, in fact, standing up for themselves as follows:

I arranged the match when you were young;

How could I tell whether you would get on together later?

There are also folk songs which do not stop at cursing the go-betweens, but openly reproach the parents: "Just blame the old folks for making a mistake" Another spiritual bond of feudal society—"The father's word is law," "Obey your father," or "Parents can do no wrong"—was thus disregarded too.

Among works attacking the old marriage system, some verses made by a North Shensi woman show a very rebellious spirit This woman's history is a most moving one She was the daughter of a poor peasant. Her mother married three times, her second step-father being a labourer in a charcoal kiln When she was only three years old her father staked her in gambling and lost, and when she was thirteen the winner claimed her in marriage. By the time she was sixteen she would make verses to sing to herself as she cooked or spun, or make songs with other village women to sing together This is how she expressed her strong desire for free marriage:

The pear has white blossom,

Till I die I'll insist on divorce!

The flax blossoms and ripens,

Overthrow the old order to look for a good man!

May my mother-in-law die first, then my husband,

Carrying shoes under my arms I'll look for a new man

She not only cursed her "good-for-nothing" husband and hoped he would die soon, but considered what she would do after his death:

Dying at dusk he'll be buried by night,

I shall have wedding shoes made by dawn!

With mutton in one pan, noodles in another,

I'll celebrate my husband's death!

This shows great courage and determination. And we believe the spirit shown in these works may be due to the fact that they were composed at a time when many districts in North Shensi had undergone a baptism of fire during the agrarian revolution Although not all the problems left from the old marriage system had been settled, still conditions were already ripe for a settlement. Hence these works are permeated with confidence and courage, and the women's marriage question is linked up with the whole question of overthrowing the old order and setting up a new

In certain earlier North Shensi verses the people of the old society are also clearly portrayed, particularly the women's desire for free marriage They either state straight out: "Look for a husband who's young," "Look for a husband with handsome eyes", or, approaching the question from the opposite side "Don't look for a husband among little monkeys," "Don't look for a husband among opium smokers." Elsewhere

they openly announce: "The smooth cotton quilt and flannel spread go together; if we like each other it's nobody else's business." Other localities have, "Don't marry a scholar," "Choose a hero," "Look for a young wife," and similar songs about girls' choice of men or young men's choice of girls. A moving song from Kiangsu not only expresses the woman's desire for marriage, but at the same time describes the noble character which "riches cannot stain nor poverty change":

*If I can't find the right man, I shall be so angry,
Not even a room heaped with gold will please me.
But if I marry a good and clever fellow,
Even begging for a living I shall be happy.*

We may not consider all their criteria of selection important today, but the fact that women of the old society spoke openly of their love and what they hoped for in marriage is at all events a noteworthy expression of their longing for freedom.

Love songs constitute the majority of the folk songs collected in various districts; hence our estimate of such songs has a close bearing on our estimate of folk songs as a whole. In certain districts, especially where there were national minorities, love songs appear chiefly as a comparatively free expression of mutual love between young people; and it is evident from them that in these places the feudal power was relatively weak. But in other districts nearer the interior, many love songs were expressions of love which the society of that time and place would not tolerate. From these love songs again we can see clearly the oppression of feudal society, and the opposition to the oppression. The North Shensi songs *Making Friends* and *Friendship*, the Kiangsu and Chekiang song *Making Friends*, and the Kwangtung songs *Boy Friend* and *Girl Friend* are, to use the language of official disapproval, concerned with "elopements" or "illicit love." In short, such love was illegal. This illegality does not merely refer to married men or women falling in love; even the love of unmarried girls and young men was illegal if their parents had not sanctioned the match, or the go-between officiated. Owing perhaps to the fact that women were more cruelly oppressed than men, whereas the men's love songs sometimes sound faint-hearted, the women's declarations are always outspoken and passionate. This characterises the North Shensi verses dealing with women's love, and there are not a few similar folk songs in other localities:

*I'm not afraid of a beating or scolding,
Beaten at the front door I slip out through the back door.
Even if I'm beaten black and blue,
I will not give up my lover.
I'm not afraid of death or shame,
Punishment only spurs me on.
I'm not afraid of a thousand eyes watching,
Nor of a myriad houses between us.
I tell my lover not to be afraid,*

I shall take the blame, whatever happens!
I can plead in the court,
I can help if you need money to bribe officers
A chain has ninety-nine links,
You and I are bound together for good
I'm not afraid of the law or officers,
Leaving the court we'll walk hand in hand.

Such declarations were a bold challenge to the rulers of feudal and semi-feudal society and those upholders of feudal order who interpreted the love poems of the ancient *Book of Songs* as "poems censuring depravity" and decreed: "To starve to death is a small matter, but to lose one's chastity is a heinous offence." When the old courts spoke of an "injury to public morality" and "corruption of morals," they probably had in mind precisely this type of folk literature

It is essential to relate these love songs to the old marriage system, the old social system and the suffering of women under these systems, for only then can we fully appreciate their significance.

However, we should press our analysis further. Illicit love was not only an inevitable product of the old society, not only an expression of revolt. It is necessary to realise that the outcome of this revolt was inevitably unhappy. Revolt could never really solve the problem. Instead of reading these love songs in the spirit of past scholars who simply appreciated the passionate love portrayed there, we should reflect on the tragic outcome of that short-lived love. The North Shensi song *Blue Flower* tells the story of a woman over a comparatively long period. It describes her beautiful girlhood, the unhappy marriage she was forced into against her will, her illicit love, and finally the ruin of this love. But this folk song (or rather those verses we have collected) does not describe what happened to Blue Flower in the end. *Her Lover* gives a fuller description of a woman's life. Many verses of this song are put into the mouth of the heroine, Kuei Chieh, who openly declares she has had three lovers in succession. Does this mean she was really so depraved as to have lost all sense of shame? Another character in the song, who is entrusted with Kuei Chieh's messages, reproaches her to her face: "It's not proper for you two to carry on in this way." However, this folk song describes a true situation which is very seldom mentioned in other works. She wanted lovers because her husband was only sixteen, and in his sixteenth year he ran away to Shansi, moreover, having neither parents nor children, she found life unbearable, and felt she must have lovers. However, she was not satisfied with such a life, saying, "It makes me wild to talk about it." Her first love affair lasted three years, the second for four whole years. Her third lover was Li Te-tsai, who ran away after half a year and did not come back. Later Li Te-tsai received a message from her, and hurried back to see her, but she was already dying. This song ends on a pathetic note:

Even though I am dying,

*Li Te-tsai will not come back;
When I go to hell,
No more marriage for me.*

The death of this countrywoman of a broken heart provides us with a faithful picture of the simple yet heartrending tragedies of the old society.

Members of the old society, particularly the women who demanded freedom of marriage, could not realise their desires till the whole social system had undergone a change. In the new democratic society, following the nation-wide promulgation of the revolutionary marriage law, the evils of the old marriage system reflected in the old folk songs are becoming a thing of the past. True loyalty between man and wife can only be established on the new social foundation, and in the new folk songs women will appear in quite a different guise.

IV

The folk songs often give a number of different reasons why the peasants should sing, of which the following are examples: "The ploughman sings when hard at work," "Singing can banish care," "Singing can win a wife," "Singing is as good as food," "Singing can console a bachelor." To sum up, the functions of folk songs, according to their composers, are roughly three: to make you forget how tired you are, to keep up your spirits, and to help in courting.

These songs had their origin in labour. In his work, *On Art*, Plekhanov says: "Among primitive people each kind of labour has its appropriate song, the tune often exactly suited to the rhythm of the action peculiar to that task." In Chinese villages, in addition to pounding songs, water-wheel songs, sowing and other labouring songs, many other folk songs are connected with labour. When the North Shensi herdsmen tend their cattle in the valleys or when the North Shensi women sit at their looms, they often sing rhyming couplets. In areas of backward technique folk songs are relatively developed, one reason for this being, perhaps, that under such conditions labour is particularly arduous. Of course the labourers in the old society suffered many other disappointments too. "The couplets follow one another. If they stopped, poor folks would have no way of banishing care." This folk song tells us yet another function of the working people's literary art. We should not consider this merely as a negative catharsis; the chief thing is that these songs express the discontent and protest of labouring people at their past fate. The fact that labour was generally exploited in the old society and the position of the labourers made it impossible for them to forget reality, imposed limitations on songs to dispel the weariness of labour and other cares. Two folk songs from Kiangsi and Kiangsu express this:

Up at daybreak, and not a grain of rice,

*Sing a song to satisfy hunger!
They say by singing you can think yourself full,
But the more you sing the hungrier you grow!*

*As I sing to banish care,
You think I'm happy
I have breakfast, but must go supperless;
My heart is full of bitterness.*

However, what we want to discuss is not the extent to which singing was effective, but the question why, apart from courtship purposes, the peasants also liked to sing love songs in order to forget their weariness and cares. Having stated that love songs must be either the expression of mutual love of young men and girls in districts where the sway of feudalism was relatively weak, or else the expression of revolt against feudalism, what are we to make of another type of folk song which is not a declaration of love but simply an exaggerated description of love affairs?

"No song is complete without a boy and girl." "You can't sing songs without girls" Evidently love songs and songs dealing with boys and girls have existed since time immemorial. "Seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds like to sing songs." This helps to explain why such songs spread far and wide. In order to keep their spirits up, workers would sing about their work and troubles beside singing ancient ballads, humorous and other songs; but the prevalence of love songs is not difficult to explain. Folk songs are not only literature but music. The language of music is not as definite as that of language in general, but highly evocative. So a single folk song can be sung with different emotions. Thus it is quite natural to find the same songs sung under different conditions and different songs under the same conditions

It is also understandable that in addition to love songs there are other folk songs dealing with young men and girls, for whatever exists in human life will be reflected in folk songs. Such reflections, if uttered in the first person, are love songs, while if in the third person they take the form of compositions like the *North Shensi Writhing Dragon Street*, *A Shopkeeper Lost Her Daughter* and *Ten Mile Hostel*. The case of folk songs like *A Maid Looks for a Man* may be somewhat different "Lasses and lads grow up and marry" is a truism. But to say that girls of seventeen and eighteen think of nothing but marriage, and spend all their time looking for men, is obviously a masculine boast. Other even more obvious boasts are found in *Cutting Leeks*, *The Girl Carrying Water* or *Song of the Fifth Watch*.

The so-called obscene songs lacking any positive meaning differ from city songs. Of course there are bad men and women in the country too, and these may be their compositions; but it would be wrong to consider all folk songs which deal with lovers, or even those which use exaggerated language, as low-class. This is chiefly the outcome of the economic exploitation and political oppression which deprived the peasants of proper

man and wife relations. It is the improper expression of a proper desire. We agree these songs are improper; but it is essential to realise that they still differ fundamentally from the licence of the exploiting class and the decadence of the petty bourgeoisie

Of course there are folk songs which are worse than the above, for although the tyranny of feudal thought makes itself felt much less in folk songs than in folk drama, it is still present. Three out of more than a thousand North Shensi songs we have seen smack very strongly of feudalism. The song *Good Teaching*, for instance, which shows a mother instructing her daughter, is a miniature *Daughter's Canon*. *Advice to a Husband* is another such song where a wife pleads with her husband to win fame, cherish his parents and shun wine, women, wealth and war. At bottom this is propaganda for the philosophy of the feudal class. Another song, *In Quest of Her Lover*, describes how before a young betrothed couple could marry the groom fell ill and died, and the girl committed suicide. The folk songs on ancient legends in different localities also frequently introduce stories of loyalty, filial piety, righteousness, chastity and so forth. Other compromising ideas are not entirely absent from folk songs. There is a song which appears in similar forms in Kiangsu and Chekiang, about a young daughter-in-law who led a wretched life. Some versions say she wanted to commit suicide by drowning, others describe how she pleaded with her husband and mother; but her neighbours, husband and mother all begged her to be patient. "One is daughter-in-law for twenty years, mother-in-law for twenty years, and grand matriarch for twenty years." "When that time comes you will sit in the place of honour on a big chair." "Boiled pork will be presented to the matriarch," or "Rich food, silk clothes and a pavilion are her lot." In a word, this was an attempt to reconcile her to her humiliation by holding out hope of future dignity and comfort. Such ideas are undoubtedly insidious. It is possible some of these songs were not written by working people at all, or if they were it was the result of their long-term exploitation and oppression. On the whole, however, what we have noted in folk songs in the main is not this passive side, but many positive features expressing the working people's stand and interest. Even songs the themes of which have no positive significance, in common with various other forms of folk literature, often manifest in their phraseology a spirit of boldness and audacity characteristic of the working people

V

If the foregoing analysis is correct, we are justified in concluding that the folk songs produced in the old society were for the most part peasant songs, and the chief thing about them is that they reflected the tragic life of the peasants in the past and their revolt against such a life. Because

feudal rule in China covered a particularly long period, the spiritual life of the peasants could not fail to be deeply influenced by feudalism. This is a common feature of all Chinese folk art. In the folk songs, however, this influence is evident, for the most part, not in any invasion of feudal thought but in the preponderance of works opposing the oppressive feudal order. Since the rule of the feudal class at that time seemed immutable and, except during periods of revolt, the peasants had no organisation, they could not foresee the future of society as a whole; hence their revolts could never be highly integrated, but were always open and direct, usually attacking abuses from various angles, and sometimes adopting devious methods. However, since the beginning of the new democratic revolution, a fundamental change has taken place in the destiny of the Chinese peasantry. That is to say we have recently witnessed a peasant movement and a peasant war led by the proletariat. In this revolutionary movement and revolutionary war the peasants' political consciousness and degree of organisation have attained an unprecedentedly high level. Such a fundamental change could not fail to be reflected in the peasants' literature, in other words, they could not fail to produce new folk songs differing from the old folk songs. These new songs are no longer an expression of the tragic life of the peasants, but are for the most part revolutionary battle songs or songs to praise the life in the new society.

Up to the present, most of the new folk songs we have collected in North Shensi. This is because North Shensi, liberated during the agrarian revolution, remained in the people's hands; hence these new folk songs circulated and developed, and a considerable collection of them was made by musicians and literary workers. They constitute valuable material. We may regret the scarcity of records of the fights of ancient Chinese peasants in old folk literature, but these new folk songs of North Shensi make us fully conscious of the blazing enthusiasm of the contemporary agrarian revolution. The comrades who took part in the agrarian revolution of North Shensi always spoke with feeling of the spirit of the masses during that time. There was no need for any mobilisation, they said, for there was generally no end to the peasants who joined the Red Army guerrilla troops. The peasant women of that time, as soon as they were emancipated from the family, shouldered packs and travelled from place to place as propagandists for the revolution, making speeches and singing songs. Soldiers and peasants of the Red Army, men and women, old and young alike all loved to sing the revolutionary songs, so that the sound of singing was heard everywhere. As yet we have no historical poem reflecting this great revolutionary period. Of course these new North Shensi folk songs only form fragmentary records; however, taken in the aggregate, they succeed in expressing the revolutionary spirit of the time quite well. They sing the revolutionary war and the aspirations of the people. They overflow with confidence in the triumph of the revolution, with warm support and praise of the Communist Party, the Red

Army of peasants and workers, and the leaders of the revolution. And they adopt an extremely firm attitude toward the enemies of the revolution, from the landlords and local gentry down to the imperialists. In such songs as *Take Michih by Storm*, *Capture Chingchien* and *Take Yen-an*, specific mention is made of the enemies of the revolution who must be annihilated. Readers who have not yet joined the revolution or the popular masses may consider there is too much talk of killing here, and the peasants are too fierce. However, as Chairman Mao said in his *Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, the severe punishments meted out by peasants to the local gentry did not signify "extremism" or "anarchy"; they signified that in the past those local gentry had oppressed and exploited the people savagely. Moreover, the enemies of the revolution referred to in these new folk songs of North Shensi are for the most part not ordinary landlords, but criminal gentry of that locality, who had not only oppressed the peasants cruelly in the past, but during the agrarian revolution had led troops and organised counter-revolutionary forces to suppress the revolution. Such incorrigible counter-revolutionaries had to be wiped out, for unless the revolutionaries destroyed the counter-revolutionaries they would be destroyed by them. It was a real life and death struggle, a real revolution. The composers of these songs realised this quite well, for they said: "The Red Army is doing good work uprooting trouble for us." "When you catch a villain, kill him without a qualm." "The Red Army is for the people, but the gentry trample on the masses." It is just as another song said: "The people see things clearly now."

The new love songs produced during this period also had a completely new content. The political factor was of prime importance to women choosing a husband. Either they joined the revolution together: "You'll be a fighter, I'll do propaganda work; how happy we'll be working for the revolution!" Or they agreed: "We'll marry when the revolution's succeeded!" When they parted they no longer wept bitterly, but waited hopefully: "You join the Red Army, I'll work at home; when the revolution succeeds, we'll see each other again!" Some of the women were so advanced they could say: "As long as the revolution succeeds, it doesn't matter if my man dies!" This was an entirely new woman, and an entirely new man-woman relationship. This shows these working women already realised that their individual happiness was bound up with the revolution, so that unlike the women of the past they no longer centred all their hopes on love and marriage.

Since North Shensi did not suffer directly from Japanese fascism, not many anti-Japanese folk songs were produced during the war; but songs about democratic construction occupy a very important place. The famous song about Chairman Mao, *The East in Red Glow*, was composed by a North Shensi peasant. The songs *Labour Hero Wang Ko* and *Shih Ming-teh* not only reflect contemporary productive labour, but also express the workers' consciousness that they are masters of the new society. Dur-

ing the anti-Japanese war North Shensi was besieged on three sides by Kuomintang troops, accordingly among the folk songs of the time appeared works sharply exposing the reactionary clique. Two working songs movingly depict the resolution of our village cadres and the brutality of the bandit army. In *Troop Movement*, written by a deserter from the Kuomintang army in Ningsia, the character Ma Hung-kuei's name can be exchanged for Chiang Kai-shek or any other leader of the reactionary clique. This is how the song ends:

*Ma Hung-kuei, listen to me!
You made beggars of the people!
Without clouds it won't rain,
Without earth plants won't take root;
Your work has been in vain.*

*Ma Hung-kuei's a coward,
Day and night he can't sleep for fear;
He's not afraid of anything else,
Only that the people may revolt;
So day and night he shifts in his shoes.*

The composer of this folk song apparently realised, even at that time, the precarious tenure of the reactionary rule, and predicted its downfall.

During the war of liberation the song-loving people of North Shensi must have produced many new songs; unfortunately we have not had access to them. Not many songs have been collected from other districts either, but the following song, composed after the liberation of Linfen, appeared in a newspaper.

*The dull days are not as long as the bright,
Suddenly the sun has come out in Linfen.
If you ask where the sun is,
It's the Chinese Communist Party.*

This new folk song is rich in meaning. The clouds that lowered over the heads of the Chinese people have gone never to return. This dull weather, judging by the past, lasted a long time—several thousand years. However, compared with the unending free and happy life of the future it really was very short.

VI

It may be felt that although the thought content of the new folk songs is very high, artistically speaking they are inferior to the old songs. And certainly if we take the average new song and compare it with the very best of the old there are grounds for such a view. We must not, however, forget that the best of the old songs are the product of a very long time.

of selection and polishing by many people, as is expressed in a folk song of the Miao people of Hochih, Kwangsi:

*A song is not made by one inspired person,
It's handed down by the old folk from earlier days;
One man tells three, three tell nine;
River water washes away sand till the river becomes deeper.*

Certain of the new folk songs, also, are artistically mature; but many, because they have not yet undergone the polishing of time, embody defects of comparative crudity or incompleteness.

Apart from certain works on stale and threadbare themes, the new and old love songs alike share the artistic virtue of being able to go straight to the heart. As the following song has it: "Folk songs are based not on books, but on life." This is because, in the first place, the song makers shared the thoughts and feelings of the labouring people; moreover all had their own tasks and made songs because of an inner compulsion; hence the content, to begin with, is likely to prove affecting. In the second place, certain artistic features peculiar to the songs aided the expression and pathos of the content.

Art's most important characteristic is form. And the form of folk songs is generally fresh and moving, reflecting the life of the working people. When we read one of the couplets current in North Shensi:

*Wheat in the front furrow, rice in the back,
Whenever I think of him I cry—*

We realise at once that this is the expression of a peasant woman, whose simple emotion harmonises perfectly with the country surroundings.

*Working at the spinning wheel, my hand is never still.
I wish I could stay longer with my lover.*

This also brings before our eyes in a flash a young woman seated at her spinning wheel, thinking of her lover as she works.

*Of all the grain in the field, kaoliang is tallest;
Of all the girls in thirteen provinces, Blue Flower is best.*

Few praises of girls' beauty in literary compositions are as simple and moving as this. And many similar examples can be found in folk songs of other districts.

Pushkin and Gorky both emphasise the importance of studying language from folk literature. Most of the folk songs of South China consist of seven-character lines, and naturally there are times when the metre and rhyme are defective. However, in spite of such a restriction, the language is moving. The four-line songs of Kiangsu have to a great extent broken through the restriction of the seven-character line, hence they appear more spontaneous than the seven-character verse where each line is of the same length. The form of many northern folk songs is even freer, as the North Shensi songs so strikingly attest. Although the same beat is observed throughout, the number of characters varies; and this form being more natural and colloquial is better able to preserve the special features of the working people's speech. In a study of the speech of work-



The Whole Family Goes to the Election

WANG HONG-AN, FU CHUNG, FU CHUNG

ers, the chief thing, undoubtedly, is to learn from living people; however, a study of their oral literature has an additional advantage in that this speech has undergone a process of refining. And for those writers who are still unable to refine the colloquial speech of workers into literary language, such a study is of particular importance. Moreover, the language of folk songs is more polished and contains fewer platitudes than that of relatively longer oral literature such as folk plays and folk sagas.

An ancient Roman poet gave the following definition of an epigram: "Epigrams are like bees, three things being necessary: firstly a sting, secondly honey, thirdly a small body." Chinese folk poetry is not as condensed or compressed as epigrams, being largely lyrical and concerned with a portrayal of life; but many lyrical folk songs do contain honey as well as a sting within a small compass. If we consider refining as one of the chief features of all poetic forms (even successful longer works are also refined in accordance with the richness of the living content they reflect), then this technical virtue of the folk song deserves the full attention of our song makers. This does not mean we can only write lyrical poems as short as folk songs. On the contrary, in order to portray the richness and complexity of modern life we must also write long poems. However, in writing long poems we must also strive for purity and conciseness.

Since folk songs, like the earliest songs, are closely linked with music, we have another artistic excellence—a clear and natural rhythm. In writing new poems there is no need for each poet in each poem to copy measures of folk poems, however, both poetry of a definite pattern as well as free verse should have a beautiful rhythm. The difference in rhythm between poems of a definite pattern and free verse is simply that the former have a regular rhythm and the latter an irregular. But no poetry in the world can do without beautiful rhythm.

The above is simply an attempt from the literary viewpoint to point out the artistic characteristics of folk songs touching very briefly on the chief points.

VII

Gorky said, "Authors ignorant of folk literature are bad authors." Since the May Fourth Movement, many Chinese authors have failed in this respect. Of course all that is good and useful in foreign literature and art should be studied, however, though folk literature is not everything, we must not ignore our literary heritage and the treasury of our own folk literature. For authors who have not grown up among the working people it is even more necessary to follow the example of Pushkin and strive to correct the defects of their past education by a close study of folk literature. Since the 1912 Campaign to Rectify the Style in Writing...

attitude towards folk literature has undergone a radical change, and we have scored certain successes in this study. *The White-haired Girl*, which was an adaptation of a new folk story, achieved a revolutionary romanticism rare in other works on similar themes. *Wang Kuei and Li Hsiang-hsiang*, by using the rhyming couplet form, won more readers than other new poetry. Our novelists, dramatists and poets have begun, to a greater or lesser extent, to absorb the good points of folk literature. Nevertheless, we must also admit that up to the present the work of collecting folk literature has been quite inadequate, while the case regarding research work is even worse. Some writers only study folk literature for its various styles. Undoubtedly the study of form is very important. But we must not, because of this, neglect the study of content which is paramount. Secondly, we must not consider form as nothing more than style. Amongst the rich varieties of folk literature, it would be wrong to notice only the excellence of one or two styles. For instance, the rhyming couplet is undoubtedly a free and beautiful style; but if all poems were written in that form it would prove very monotonous; while for broader and more heroic themes the rhyming couplet form would not be entirely suitable. A genuinely great artist should have a keen enough perception to absorb the richness of our literary heritage and at the same time break through its limitations to create compositions of his own, new both in form and content.

Red Lanterns

(A Popular Folk Song)

*Red lanterns, bound with gold and silver thread.
Pasted with golden flowers'
"What are these lanterns for?"
"To hang over Tien An Men!"*

*High hang the lanterns, red turns the sky
As people come from far and near to look.
And the lanterns shine out
Over five hundred million people.*

*The red lanterns, shining
Like the Big Dipper in the sky.
Burn steadily through wind and rain
Like the light of freedom.*

*"Of all the lanterns which is brightest?"
"The red one in the centre
Which shines on Chairman Mao's portrait
But he is brighter far than the red lanterns!"*

Let The Border Region People Unite As One!

(Old International Area Song)

*Let our Border Region people unite as one!
The eagle of free has blossomed red over the land—
We are the tree as old as Time, with deep and lasting roots,
That blossom and bear fruit every day, and every year.*

1. Tien An Men is one of the public squares in Peking, the capital of China. It is the largest square in the world.

*All the great region round Yenan
Is a granary our army's won!
We shall not want for food or clothes,
With Mao Tse-tung to lead us on!*

To Chairman Mao

(A Tibetan Song)

*Green, green the pine on the hill,
Gently, gently flows the stream,
Warm, warm the light of the sun,
Dearer than parents is Mao Tse-tung'*

What Chairman Mao's Done For Us

(A Miao Song)

*In days gone by,
When we were children
Just one or two years old,
During the Long March Mao Tse-tung came to our land,
And wrote the truth in all our villages,
Calling on us Miao people to rise,
So that we could have food and clothing.*

*When we were a little older,
Our mothers told us:
"You should know, children,
Once our champion passed here.
But then he left,
And hasn't been heard of since."*

*We waited and waited
Fourteen long years,
And in the fifteenth year
Our father and champion came back
And called on us to rise!*

*So we've come together,
Following in the footsteps of Mao Tse-tung
Now we've plenty of food and clothes
We've all grown plump and clear,
Clear as the mountain spring,
And bright as pearls!*

What Makes Sister-in-law Smile

(A Huan Valley Song)

*The magpie's cry means happy news—
My brother's sent home a registered letter!
But before I have even a chance to read it,
My sister-in-law has snatched it away
"That's not right, Sis!" I try to tell her,
"Is nobody else to know his news?"
Sister-in-law opens up the letter,
And as she reads it smiles to herself.
I speak several times,
But she doesn't hear.
So I pretend to be angry,
And shout:
"What's he written?
I went to Iron!"
When Sister-in-law sees how angry I am
Her smile spreads all over her face,
"Little Brother," she says, "do you know what?
Your elder brother's been cornered
For excellent work at the River Hsi!"*

Village Vignettes

by Chin Chao-yang

THE YOUNG WIFE

TSUI was vice-chairman of the village. Sometimes, when there was a lot to do and meetings were held in the evenings, he would come home very late, provoking the displeasure of his young wife Chiu. She used to complain away: "So you say meetings are more important than eating or sleeping, so if you have meetings, you don't get sleepy or hungry, so why come home at all?"

In the summer, before going out to a meeting after supper, Tsui would always light a kind of twisted grass to repel the mosquitoes; but every time he came home to find the piece of twisted grass stamped out and the mosquitoes in the room droning away deafeningly. Meanwhile his wife had gone to sleep on the roof, having hauled the ladder up with her.

In the winter, when he came home from his meetings, the door would invariably be locked, and no amount of shouting would get it opened.

Tsui, an emancipated peasant, had at the age of twenty-six married a girl whom he knew to be an only daughter, spoiled and still like a child at the age of nineteen. Now he did not have the heart to quarrel with her, and could only exercise patience.

After the autumn harvest last year, the village started boosting the quick-learning literacy campaign. Tsui had registered for the classes, and for more than a fortnight he would get home every night at midnight, still mumbling the phonetic alphabet before going to sleep. This incensed his wife still further and increased the nagging.

"Quick-learning method! Quick-learning method! I think it should be called mind-crazing method—it's put you out of your mind!" And she had no patience with his attempts to explain to her the great significance of literacy as a part of the peasant's emancipation.

As a girl at home, Chiu's daily duties had consisted, aside from her sewing, of light chores at the edges of the fields, and she scarcely bothered her head about household affairs. Furthermore, liberation had come rather late to this region, and Chiu's mother was old-fashioned and set

in her ways, never encouraging Chiu to participate in the social activities of the village. How was she then to be anything but like a child? How was she to appreciate the importance of work and study?

Chiu had touched only one book and that was a volume which her mother had given her at the time of her marriage, as a receptacle between its pages for needles thread, and shoe patterns. It was a rather thick book, cloth-covered and bound, filled with black characters in little red squares. Every time she did her sewing, she would thumb through it, but it never entered her mind to discover just what sort of book it was, just what meaning its contents bore. After Tsui had joined the literacy classes, he sometimes brought home a thin book or two, but Chiu showed no interest in them, and indeed, sometimes in her annoyance at the absorbing interest they commanded from him would viciously fling them aside or hide them, giving Tsui a desperate time of searching.

On this particular day, Tsui came home late as usual and as usual, opened the door by prying up the latch with his pocket-knife. He lit the lamp, and beheld his wife clasping the baby, lying motionless face to the wall, blissfully snoring away.

So, thought Tsui, can it be that all the racket I made trying to open the door didn't wake you? Such acting!

He coughed twice, and twice again, but Chiu did not stir, and went on snoring peacefully.

He lit his pipe from the lamp flame and smoked, then knocked the ashes out hard against the edge of the *lung* with a loud tap.

"Isn't it enough that you don't come home till the dead of night that you must also raise the devil when you are home? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" Chiu had turned and was now sitting up muttering peevishly.

Half in earnest half jokingly, Tsui retorted: "Why should I be ashamed of myself? Don't I improve myself culturally, the better to serve the people?"

"Serve the people? I serve you! Have your meals cooked and you eat, have your bed warmed and you sleep. I even have to leave the baby in the middle of the night to go feed the livestock. . . ."

"Oh hush up will you?" Tsui was afraid the neighbours would hear everything to their mortification and wished to terminate the conversation quickly.

"All right let's shut up. Hereafter nobody speaks to either of us." Chiu pointed, crawled under the blanket and turned her face to the wall.

Tsui, relieved that his ears no longer buzzed, lay down and went to sleep. But Chiu had the blanket wrapped tight around her head so as not to turn her head loose.

"Do you mean being deaf?"

For once or twice since the wife did not stir.

"Are you deaf or alive?"

Dead or alive, the wife still did not stir.

"All right. So you have nothing to do with me. As far as I'm concerned, I have no more family. I'm off!"

Tsui actually opened the door and went out on the street. He began to walk.

There was a tang of late autumn in the air and the wind was chilling. The myriad stars in the sky shivered as with cold, and there was a dead stillness in the deserted streets. Not even a dog barked.

He strolled for a while, and came back.

Chiu had not moved. The wick of the oil lamp burned with a steady, brush-like flame, sending a thin line of smoke straight towards the ceiling.

Tsui smoked another pipeful and glared pensively at the lamp. Strike her? he mused. No, men and women have equal rights, that won't do. Tell her off? My tongue's a stupid one, and her ears have a way of stopping up.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him.

From the big red cabinet which stood against the wall, he took out a new blanket, a new pair of shoes, two pairs of socks, several other articles of clothing, and a piece of rope, and began folding and piling them into a bundle, all the while talking under his breath:

". . . I've long had this in mind—go to Peking and look for work. That's it—a sight better than always being made angry at home. It's late, I'll just have time to get to the city by dawn. Then, take the train—and never even a word home. . . ."

He finished packing his bundle, placed it on the edge of the *kang*, turned around, stooped, slipped his arm through the rope, and straightened up. Oomph! Not so light!

Chiu was desperately clinging to the bundle. She whimpered:

"You're too heartless! You really mean to go off?"

"You think I don't mean it?" He struggled to get the bundle on his back.

"You, you have the heart to desert us?" There were tears in Chiu's voice.

"It's not I who am heartless enough to leave. It's you who are heartless enough to turn me out!" He tugged harder at his bundle.

"Oh! How can you be so cruel!" Chiu finally burst into tears. On the *kang*, their three-month-old infant also began to wail.

Tsui withdrew his arm from under the rope, turned around, and, laying his hand on the bundle, said: "If you don't want me to go, that's all right with me too. But first let's talk terms."

"What terms? Say your terms." Chiu released her hold on the bundle, and anxiously clasped the baby to her breast, pressing a nipple into the little mouth.

Tsui sat on the edge of the *kang*, suppressing a smile and busily reaming out his pipe.

"First," he began. "hereafter when I have evening meetings, you are not to latch the door or nag, no matter how late I come home."

"I give in to you on that one." Chiu sighed with relief.

"Second, there's a campaign on to spread the quick method of learning to read and write, to wipe out illiteracy. It's very important, very important. I've joined the classes, and you'll have to join too."

There was a long pause before Chiu replied in a troubled tone: "If I go to classes all hours of the night, what's going to happen to the baby?"

"I'll attend classes at night and teach you during the day. What's the problem? There's plenty of free time during these winter months . . ."

"Fine! Fine!" Chiu accompanied these exclamations with smiles.

Tsui continued: "If you agree to these two conditions of mine, I promise you three things on my part. First, that I'll keep the water jar filled every day. Second, on nights when the meetings and study classes last a long time, I will take time out to come home and feed the livestock. Third, I pledge that I shall patiently teach you how to read and write and won't ever get annoyed."

Husband and wife began carrying out their family compact the next day. A low table was placed on the *lao* in front of Chiu. While she nestled the baby in her bosom, she followed the phonetic alphabet in the text book with her fingers, repeating after Tsui: "Bao, pao, tiao, fao . . ."

On the third day, Chiu was at home doing her sewing and reviewing her phonetics at the same time, when a voice called out from the courtyard.

"Anybody home?"

"Nobody!" Chiu answered in a shrill voice.

"What do you mean nobody? Don't you count as somebody?"

With this demand, in tones half-joking and half-reproving, the chairman of the village, Lu, lifted the door flap and walked in.

"Chiu, you're a person, aren't you? Your brain is still rightly backward, you still don't know what equal rights between men and women mean!"

"Who says I don't know what's equal rights betwixt men and women?" demanded Chiu in protest.

"If you know, then why don't you think of yourself as a person in your own right?"

Village Chairman Lu was a man of over forty, with two eyes of a mousetrache. Long years of responsibility and pondering over problems of work had marked his face with lines of serious concentration. Not though he spoke half in jest, yet to Chiu his face still seemed so cold, severe and stern.

Chiu cried out:

"Do the statistical records of the village show that there are more men than women? This one is a man, a whole lot more than a woman!"

person, isn't he?" Lu seemed bent on seizing one's weak point and pursuing it relentlessly. He sat on the edge of the *kang* and drew out his pipe to smoke, all the while fixing his eyes on Chiu.

After a pause, he continued:

"I've got a hunch that Tsui doesn't tell you about a lot of goings on outside, just leaving you at home to take care of the baby, and cook. . . ."

"That's true. He doesn't tell me anything." Chiu had found an excuse for herself and turned on a hurt look.

"That's very wrong!" the village chairman gave as his judgment. "You're quite young, and so's he; the two of you ought to help each other get ahead—that's the right thing!"

Chiu blushed again, and the village chairman made his departure.

Not long after, another voice called out from the courtyard, this time a woman's.

"Anybody home?"

"Who is it? Come in!" Chiu revised her answer this time.

"I'm not coming in. No use talking with you, you're not the head of the household." It was the chairman of the women's association, Hsiu-ying.

"A fine one you are!" Chiu was getting piqued. "What do you mean it's no use talking to me? What do you mean I'm not head of the household?"

"If I say you can't be considered the head of the household, you can't be, that's all," the women's association chairman said with a smile, at the same time lifting the door flap and entering. "You see, it's business—clearing up accounts on the work done in the mutual-aid team. Tsui's not home, and what's the good of discussing it with you?"

"So Tsui's not home and it's no use discussing things with me. How's it you come to find him for Chun's papa?" Chun's father was Hsiu-ying's husband. Chiu thought she had made quite a point and was talking just as clever as the village chairman had done a little while before.

"Look," Hsiu-ying said, sitting on the edge of the *kang*, "in the first place, although we're all members of the mutual-aid team Tsui's in, yet he's different from you. You didn't take part in the field work, so have no part in sharing out the income according to work done. Besides, you wouldn't be able to figure out what's meant by 'sharing out the income according to work done.' In the second place, you don't know how to read and write, and wouldn't be able to read the books and work on figures. Do you know what this is all about? Isn't it useless to talk with you?"—with this, she waved the account book in front of Chiu's face. "I, at least, for better or worse, know a few characters, and know what business is involved here. . . ."

Chiu's face reddened once again and Hsiu-ying left.

A little later, yet another voice was heard from the courtyard. It was Wang, head of village civil affairs.

"Anybody home?"

Chiu took a long while to answer.

"Yes, I'm home."

"You won't do. I'll still have to look for him."

Wang turned and left. Chiu's face flushed.

She was getting angry. How is it that so many people come today, following on each other's heels? And every one so nasty?

What she did not know was that Tsui had given a full account to his Party group of the events of two nights before and of Chiu's backwardness, hoping that his comrades in the group would help to educate her. Today's visits were the result of a plan made to suit the particular circumstances of Chiu's case. They had said: "Among us cadres, everyone bears the responsibility for any in our families being backward. . . ."

After another interval, Tsui returned. Chiu said softly but reproachfully: "You come home and never tell me a word of what's going on outside. Some people came a little while ago, and I didn't know a thing about anything they talked about."

"Am I to blame for not telling you, or is it you who don't listen when I tell you?" Tsui could scarcely suppress a smile. "Hereafter, you must improve yourself, keep up with the times."

Chiu once more blushed. Then she smiled.

Tsui was inwardly elated. Casually he reached out to pick up the fat book in which Chiu pressed her shoe patterns and opened it at random to a page on which was inscribed: "Paid to the porter of the court for a gift, 500 cash exactly. . . . Paid to Mr. Wang for filing the official complaint, 200 cash exactly. . . ." Tsui read the entries aloud, arousing Chiu's curiosity.

"Read on," she urged.

Tsui continued, "May 30th—the thirteenth hearing of the case, no decision. . . . Paid for food and lodgings at the hotel—200 cash exactly. . . ."

"Hah! I know what it is now!" Chiu gave her leg a vigorous slap which woke the baby and started it howling.

It seemed that Chiu's grandfather, in fighting a court battle with a rich landlord over a few acres of land and in half a lifetime of litigation, had used up more than half the sum and a big piece of his life's earnings. The account book, moreover, was a slipshod affair in the highest degree.

"This book is a record of how the family was ruined. Yet my grandfather only used it a whole lifetime to tell his sons and grandsons that he had lost it all. . . . How can I tell my children that I have lost it all? . . . I know what's going on!"

Chiu vented all her annoyance of a few moments before on this account book. She shook out the needles, thread, and shoe patterns from between its leaves, stuffed the book into the grate of the *kang*, and set fire to it.

Tsui seized the opportunity to talk more understanding into Chiu.

That night, Chiu turned over the day's events in her mind and did not sleep a wink. She even got up twice to fill the feed bins for the livestock. The next morning, without waiting for Tsui to waken, she carried buckets of water to fill the water jars. Later, she reached a new understanding with Tsui. "As long as you help me learn to read and write and help me get ahead, and as long as you go on doing good work in the village, I'll take over all the household chores. Then, after the New Year, I'm going to do my share of the work in the fields too. . . ."

From this time on, Chiu was a changed person. She often went to the literacy classes with the baby in her arms and took the initiative in applying for membership in the Youth League. If people came looking for her husband, she would say, "You can talk with me. My word goes, too!" And the response would be, "I know we can take your word on things, because I know how things stand between you two."

But how extensive this change really was, only Tsui knew fully.

One night, Tsui returned from a meeting in the small hours of the morning. Very lightly, he pushed open the front door, very softly stepped into the outer room, and then pushed open the door of the inner room. On the table stood the little oil lamp, the snuff of its wick sputtering low. The baby was sound asleep on the *kang*. The bed had been made ready, and the pillows laid at one end. But, where was Chiu?

He did not call out, but took the oil lamp and tiptoed into the outer room. Sure enough, there, sitting in front of the stove, leaning on the table with her head cushioned on one arm and the other arm dangling on her knees, pencil and paper in hand, was Chiu. A few strands of hair fell over her flushed cheeks. Her closed eyes were like two crescents, and the corners of her lips were curved in a smile.

Of late, Tsui had many times noticed this smile playing about her lips during their study sessions together.

He stood there looking rather foolish, uncertain whether to wake her or let her doze a little more.

Suddenly, Chiu awoke with a start and straightened up. Her large eyes blinked and she broke into a smile when she saw Tsui:

"Well! I was just dreaming that you'd come home, and here you are! The water's boiling in the kettle, and the cakes are piping hot. . . ."

"You!" Tsui stamped his foot. "I told you not to wait up for me at night, but you won't listen!"

"I wanted to. Besides, there're two characters I wanted to ask you about!" As she chattered, Chiu laid aside the paper and pencil and got

up to tend to the kettle. "You go around telling everybody that I am very diligent in my studies. Aren't you ashamed?"

At this point, steam spouted violently out of the kettle blowing out the lamp.

From beside the stove came the sound of giggling laughter. .

NOON

AT high noon, as Hsiu-ni was coming home from the fields, a vendor of chicks stopped before her door. A knot of women, young and old, gathered around the man, making selections, discussing merits, and creating a general hubbub. Hsiu-ni leant her hoe against the door; she joined the group and also began choosing her chicks

Four golden-coloured wicker baskets were fairly bursting with several hundred tiny woolly balls—newly-hatched chicks the size of the eggs from which they had just emerged. There were yellow ones, snowy white ones, mottled, jet black—delicately furred and glisteningly silken in their softness, jostling one another and uttering tiny, high-pitched cheeps—a sight to dazzle the steadiest eyes.

Hsiu-ni raised chickens every year. She had twenty last year and with the money she got from selling eggs she had bought the fertilizer which she had turned over to the agricultural producers' cooperative as capital investment. This year she intended to have even more chickens. Anyway, because she had a soft place in her heart for these innocent, precious little creatures, she was more thrilled than anyone else. Still, she remained the steadiest of them all, for she was an old hand at selecting chicks, at telling apart the cocks from the hens, the healthy from the unhealthy.

She picked out her chicks one by one, nestling them in the palms of her hands and lifting them high so that she could give them a good looking over with her big, gleaming black eyes, all the while muttering to herself. "Ah, here's a find—a rich head of fuzz and a firm little body. Mm—this one's not bad either, a furry-legged one. Those three hens I had last year with the legs covered with down looked like they had trousers on. . . This one with the long legs—not for me—it's a cock, all right!"

Tucking up the edge of her jacket, she began gently placing the chicks she had selected in the pocket thus formed. She had put in ten when she suddenly saw the manager of the cooperative walking by with

two members, carrying axes, wrenches, and other paraphernalia. A thought flashed across her mind.

"Comrade manager, have they set up the pump?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, it's all set up. What a master workman we've got!" The manager was beaming and pulling at his goatee. "Ah, and how many chicks do you expect to raise this year? Better raise more, then you can buy more fertilizer next year!"

But Hsiu-ni interrupted him with another query: "You're all coming home for lunch, but where is our pump expert?"

"He asked us to return first. He wants to stay to test the pump."

Another member, Li Teh-tsai, added in a hearty, cheerful voice: "We had a tough time trying to drag him back to eat. So we let him make his test. . . ."

Hsiu-ni did not wait for Li Teh-tsai to finish, but hurriedly paid the chicken-vendor, bundled up her chicks, picked up her hoe, and went into the house.

Her mother was poking at the grating of the stove, building a fire.

"So you've bought some chicks, Hsiu-ni," she said. "Quick, put them on the *kang* and let them bounce around a bit, so we can take another pick!"

"You don't need to take another pick. You can never go wrong with my eyes!" Still talking, she laid down her hoe and proceeded straight through the alleyway gate into the rear courtyard.

The rear courtyard consisted of a small vegetable garden where several patches of onions, scallions and radishes flourished in a pattern of green luxuriance—all enclosed by a wattle fence made of millet stalks. The fence stood on the edge of the village, and beyond stretched the rich green of the wheat fields, reaching as far as the eye could see. Sure enough, there, on the raised platform of the well not two score paces away, beneath a huge willow whose trunk you could hardly encircle with your arms, was a young man wearing a white head kerchief and a white jacket. He was hustling along the cooperative's big black mule whose circling at the end of the handle-pole motivated the endless chain in the pump. Closely peering into and above the well, the young man was completely absorbed in testing the newly-installed pump.

A light breeze swept in a grey ripple across the wheat fields with the soft murmuring sound of flowing water.

"Really . . . going without lunch even!" Hsiu-ni chided to herself. She felt a sense of regret—to-day the manager had sent her and several other women and girls to weed the young wheat sprouts, and she had not taken part in the work of installing the pump.

Every new project in the cooperative, every new step taken, always found an enthusiastic response in Hsiu-ni's heart. Take, for example, last winter, when they started making beancurd as a farm by-product, and this spring when the cooperative purchased the yellow colt. . . . In

every such event, she always wanted to be the first to join, the first to witness it with her own eyes. She felt as if it were only thus that she could more genuinely feel herself a part of these events, that she could more clearly see the future opening up before the entire cooperative, that she could gain more satisfaction out of these events.

But to-day she was even more excited over the installation of the pump than she had ever been over anything else. Why? She herself could not fathom the reason—nor did she care to do so.

She went up to the wattle fence and stood for a while. One of her chicks leapt out of the front of her jacket and fell beside the watercourse which ran under the fence. This watercourse irrigated the vegetable patches, and led directly to the well. The chick, no doubt thirsty, followed the trickle of water that ran along the bottom of the ditch, and disappeared through the hole under the fence.

Hsiu-ni suddenly had an idea. She bent down and shook all the chicks loose into the watercourse. They at once became full of excited energy, fluttering their tiny petal-like wings and stepping out with their little pink feet. Cheeping shrilly and incessantly, they scurried through the hole under the fence along the ditch in the direction of the well, pecking at the small insects resting and drinking in the moist, shaded bottom of the little gully.

"Whose chicks are these? Better take care, or they'll get lost!" the young man shouted presently.

Hsiu-ni opened the wattle fence gate and ran briskly along the ditch, saying apparently to herself: "Horrible little creatures! Take your eyes off them for a moment, and they're all over the place!"

The young man at the well had stopped urging the mule. He was leaning against the trunk of the big willow and staring at Hsiu-ni with a smile on his lips.

Hsiu-ni paused in her tracks, and forgot the chicks. She fixed her gaze on the turning pump wheel.

"I know you," the young man said after a while.

"And I know you, too," Hsiu-ni answered, tossing her braids back and smiling.

They had indeed met long before, and were mutually impressed, only they had never spoken a word to each other. The young man was named Hu Cheng. He came from Huke Village, one mile away. He was quite well known for some ten miles around in these parts, for he was the boldest in accepting innovations in farming technique. For example, everyone else generally ploughed his fields in straight parallel rows, but he ploughed his fields twice—once lengthwise and once crosswise, in checkerboard pattern. Other people trimmed their cotton crops very early, but he allowed his crop to grow to a man's height (his cotton plants were especially robust) before he trimmed them down from tapering tops to wide bases, pagoda fashion, taking care to leave the stipulated few bolls on each branch. In the end, he reaped an autumn harvest more

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than double that of the others. . . . He had never really studied how to install pumps. It was only during the provincial "production training classes" last year that he watched two pumps being installed at a state farm, and now he had become a pump expert for all the neighbouring villagers. People respected him for these things and for his quick-witted intelligence, in spite of his "queer" ways. They dubbed him "scientific expert."

All this Hsiu-ni knew, and there was admiration in her heart.

"Remember?" Hu Cheng still held Hsiu-ni in a steady gaze. "Last year, at the all-county rally?"

"I remember," Hsiu-ni replied, casually breaking off a twig from a small locust tree nearby and toying with it in her hands. She guessed that Hu Cheng had noticed her, and now her belief was confirmed. Her heart was filled with joy.

"We met again this January, at the all-county conference of cadres. Right?" Hu Cheng went on.

"Right," Hsiu-ni laughed and gave him a quick glance. "But my memory goes back further than yours. That year—I was still little and the land reform hadn't come yet—It was in the fall—I was gathering dried leaves under this very willow. . . ." She pointed at the tree against which Hu Cheng was leaning. "That landlord's brat of a son saw me and said picking leaves from his family's trees wasn't allowed. He came at me to hit me, but you were gathering kindling and happened by. . . ."

"I remember now! I remember now!" Hu Cheng laughed and felt more at ease. "Ah, you were only a slip of a girl then!" Even now he recalled with relish how on that occasion he had given a sound thrashing to that puppy of a landlord's son.

"You were just a kid yourself!" Hsiu-ni said petulantly. After a pause, she added, "Now, this well, this tree, all belong to our cooperative! And a good 30 *mou* of land besides. Just look at the young wheat, how strong and healthy it is!"

"Are you also a member of the producers' cooperative?" Hu Cheng asked with a note of envy in his voice. He had often felt impatient and unhappy over the fact that his own mutual-aid team had not gone ahead and become a producers' cooperative.

"Uh-huh, I am." Hsiu-ni felt her response had sounded too proud. She lowered her head as her cheeks flushed.

Just then, a light gust of wind stirred the leaves of the willow, making a soft patter like raindrops. The big black mule hitched to the pump had for some time stopped turning and was now craning its neck forward for a drink of the water which had just been pumped into the gully. Failing to reach it, the animal uttered its disappointment in a strident "Hyaw! Hyaw! Hyaw!"

Hsiu-ni had in fact been full of questions which she had wanted to put to Hu Cheng. For example: Is it true what they say, that you have a radio receiver? And can you hear Chairman Mao speaking from

Peking on it? Is it true that when you planted your bumper cotton crop last year, you hid among the cotton plants when you saw someone coming, for fear that people would laugh at you and say your new methods were a bluff? Why should you be afraid of people poking fun at you? . . . Ah, but how could one throw any question that comes to mind at some one whom one speaks to for the first time?

Hu Cheng also had a few questions he wanted to ask Hsiu-ni. For instance: Last year, at the county meeting, during a recess, while you were looking at some posters on the wall and I came up to talk to you, why did you step away? Then, later, when people asked you to tell your experiences in promotional work, why did you speak so briefly? Still feudal-minded? . . . For the same reasons as hers, he did not voice his queries.

As a result, they stood silently, looking rather foolish. Hu Cheng absently picking at the bark of the tree behind him and Hsiu-ni toying with the twig in her hands.

Suddenly, a man emerged from behind the grapevine arbour and called out: "Ha! I wondered why the water had stopped running in the ditch. So . . . that's what's up!"

It was Chao Hsiao-hei, who was working with Hu Cheng on the testing of the pump and had just then been directing the flow from the main watercourse onto the different parcels of land. Now, bare-headed, with his jacket thrown over his shoulders and exposing a pair of deeply-bronzed arms, he came forward with an iron spade in his hands

"Time to go home for lunch!" he said. He winked, went up to the platform of the well, and began unhitching the mule

Hsiu-ni blushed, turned, and only then remembered her chicks. They were still in the little gully, flapping their tiny wings and trying futilely to jump on to the platform of the well. Hsiu-ni shooed them off and they scuttled along the ditch again, cheeping excitedly and looking much like beautiful little balls of wool rolling along the ground

Hu Cheng gazed at Hsiu-ni's receding figure as she followed the chicks, head down and walking so slowly that she seemed hardly to be taking any steps at all. He knew what she was thinking, for he was thinking the same thing

Spring has come to the fields. Everywhere are flashes of gold and ripples of green. And everywhere new men and women, bursting with health and vigor and intelligence, are creating a happy life that is just beginning.

SACRIFICE TO THE KITCHEN GOD

ON the twenty-third of the twelfth lunar month, I was in Lungwan Village to inspect the work of helping poor army dependents during the New Year Festival. I stayed in the home of one of them—Mrs. Jou. There were three others in her family—a daughter-in-law, a 14 year old grand-daughter, and a son. The son had joined the army eleven years ago. Later, he volunteered for the Korean front, where he is now a battalion commander.

I had stayed in Mrs. Jou's home on three previous occasions, so we were old friends. Mrs. Jou always had the welcome mat out for cadres, and her daughter-in-law Tsui-lan was the vice-chairman of the village women's association. I, therefore, felt quite at home in their family circle during this lunar New Year season.

As I stepped into the courtyard, Mrs. Jou, on hearing my footsteps, peered out of the window and cried:

"Chin, so you've come! I was just about to send somebody to bring you a message. We took your advice and tore down the old storeroom—and what a treasure we found! Come in, quick, and I'll show you."

I entered the room and beheld the family three—some in the act of making meat dumplings on the *kang*. The little girl, Chen, bounced down from the *kang* and snatched something from behind the mirror on the table.

"Take a look. What's this?"

I looked. It was a photograph, faded and yellowed as if it had been immersed in tea dregs—the picture of a man, blurred beyond recognition. A corner of the photograph was marred by a round hole the size of a thumb print, as if it had been burnt through.

"Whose picture is this?" I asked.

"First climb on to the *kang* and warm yourself," said Mrs. Jou, "and I'll tell you."

I got on the *kang* and began helping with the meat dumplings. Tsui-lan wanted to make some tea for me, and I had a hard time talking her out of it. At last I succeeded, and Mrs. Jou started her story.

"It was in 1947. The Kuomintang troops made a hell out of this region. That photo is of little Chen's father. Less than three months after Chen received it in the mail, things got a bit hot, and she slid the photo between some books which she stuffed into the grate of the *kang*. One day, in barged three Kuomintang soldiers. They ransacked the place and were just about to search the grate, when Chen, who was staring with her heart in her throat, bent over the grate. Small of body but quick of limb, she grabbed the books and ran. One of the swine chased her. Just as she got to the courtyard entrance and was turning to slip out through the gate, he fired. The bullet hit the books and grazed the skin off her leg. It quite nearly scared the wits out of the little one! She didn't

realize then what had happened, but scurried into the courtyard next door and shove the photo into a pile of kindling. When that hoodlum caught up with her, he saw she held only a few books in her hands, so he gave her a couple of slaps and swore at her, then went off. The child just lay on the ground, paralyzed with fright. . . ."

Mrs Jou stopped, apparently finished. The little girl took up the recital

"Afterwards, my mother said, 'Take good care of this photo as a keepsake to show your father when he comes home, so he'll know what trouble the people have gone through!' We hid the picture in the grain storeroom—the very room you talked about"

Tsui-lan's hands, accustomed to the labour of the fields, kneaded out the meat dumplings with great dexterity and speed. Now she too chimed in with a laugh:

"After liberation, we went to the storeroom to get some grain out of one of the jars, and I said we ought to look for the photograph. Chen said it was in a wooden box buried in a corner of the wall. We dug it up and it turned out to be full of her books—but no photo! I was so disgusted I scolded her until she cried. Then, the day we tore down the storeroom—guess what? The picture was wedged into a crack in the wall! Chin, if it weren't for your suggestion, we wouldn't have found it yet!"

A fortnight ago, I had stayed over at Mrs. Jou's and had noticed that bags and jugs of flour and grain were stacked up at the head of the *lang* and on the cupboard, making the little room very cramped. Then I learned that there had originally been a storeroom in the corner of the house between the woodshed and the milling shed. Long before, when things were getting into a pretty cruel state, they had sealed up the door with earth and covered it with a plaster of mud. This completely hid it from view and prevented the enemy from seizing the grain. After liberation, the little entrance was broken open. But the storeroom could not really be called a room, it was a mere nook.

This year, after the household had joined a mutual-aid team, Tsui-lan's five *mou* of maize had yielded a bumper crop, and their other plots had also come out with extra yields of 10 to 20 percent. There was not enough room for all the grain. I told them that grain harvests would increase from year to year, and storage would become a still bigger problem. I suggested that they tear down the old storage bin and enlarge it. They had found the picture when they started this work.

Mrs Jou suddenly chuckled. "This business of the photograph brings something else to my mind. At that time, Chen was only seven years old. One day, she asked me, 'Grandma, lots of other kids' daddies who go off to join the Eighth Route Army send home their pictures. How come my daddy doesn't? We ought to write him for one.' I told her, 'Child, you've grown the spitting image of your papa. To look at you is

to see him. What do we need a photo for?" Just see, in the twinkling of an eye, the child has become a grown-up!"

Chen, hurrying along her share of the pastry, lifted her eyes and said with a smile, "Comrade Chin, know what? Mama says we must send the photograph to Korea, to remind my father how the people used to suffer, so that he'll fight the American devils all the harder!"

Tsui-lan flushed with embarrassment on hearing these words, and glared at Chen.

"You little monster! You must repeat everything, mustn't you?"

"Didn't you tell me so yourself?" Chen retorted petulantly, shaking her locks.

Tsui-lan energetically slapped a meat dumpling on to the slatted bamboo tray and said:

"Little imp, all you know is how to use a mischievous tongue! You've got a few years of schooling in your head, but you're a long way from writing the way you should!"

Abashed, Chen giggled, and the conversation shifted to something else. It was turning dark and Mrs. Jou got off the *kang* to light the lamps and went into the next room to cook supper. Chen continued in a teasing vein:

"Mama, I don't care if you are a cadre of the women's association, but can you talk Grandma out of sacrificing to the Kitchen God?¹ Do you know, she didn't tell us that she bought a catty of candied melon. It's for sacrificing to the Kitchen God for sure. Only I didn't see her buy a Kitchen God. I've looked everywhere but I can't find it."

"There are no Kitchen Gods for sale in the market now. These days, there are so few buyers that they don't sell at all." Tsui-lan spoke earnestly. She seemed to be pondering over something. After a while, she turned to me and said, "Chin, supposing you reason with her? It's no good our talking. Still superstitious in this day and age! Every year I try to persuade her, but it does no good!"

At this moment, Mrs. Jou lifted the door screen and came hobbling into the room.

"What are you, mother and daughter, muttering about? I heard it all!" she cried, but with no trace of annoyance in her voice. With that, she climbed on the *kang*, took up her pipe and lit it from the flame of the lamp.

Tsui-lan and her daughter knew that the old lady would now start a lengthy harangue. They waited, suppressing their smiles.

After she finished a pipe, Mrs. Jou finally spoke:

¹ It was customary in these parts to sacrifice to the Kitchen God on the 23rd day of the 12th lunar month with candied melon, a sweet made out of malt sugar in the shape of a melon. The candy was calculated to gum up the Kitchen God's lips with its glutinous stickiness, so that when he went to heaven he would not report anything bad about the household. The "Kitchen Gods" sold in the shops were coloured woodcuts

"You young folks, what do you know about your older generation's affairs? When I was a girl, scrubbing pots and pans and cooking every day in the kitchen, I'd get worried every time I glanced at the Kitchen God over the stove. It sounds funny, but there wasn't anything I feared more than that the old fellow might think I was wasting food and so get me matched up with some lout of an idiot. Don't you snicker, it's true. All my life I never dared to waste any food when cooking. Afterwards, I got married—true he wasn't an idiot, only poor. Year after year, I sacrificed to the Kitchen God, praying away: Venerable Kitchen God, venerable Kitchen God, hasten up to Heaven, hasten down to earth. Carry away bad luck, bring fortune and joy, propitious wind and rain harvests of bounty, granaries overflowing, peace among men, all as it should be, all to the heart's desire. . . ."

At this point, even Mrs. Jou could no longer contain herself and burst into laughter. Everyone else was breathless with uproarious mirth, shaking the room until the shadows danced.

Mrs. Jou refilled her pipe and continued. "Every year we said our prayers, every year we kowtowed, banging our heads loudly. You can't imagine how it is—just as if there were really a pale-faced, long bearded god before your eyes, your heart feels so tight with anxiety! That's how we passed over two score years of our life, but every year we were just as poor as ever. Then, during the trouble with Japan, the Eighth Route Army came in and told everybody to get rid of their superstition. But you've no idea—the rougher the times were, the more anxious you were, the more you put your heart into sacrificing to the Kitchen God on the night of the 23rd. On top of all that, little Chen's father going off to fight the Japanese. . . . Ah, I don't have to tell you. Then came the land reform. Everybody said, 'We worshipped gods all our lives, but never a grain of food dropped from heaven. Now, as soon as Chairman Mao takes the lead, we get land'—and there's a lot to that. But isn't it odd—every year, as soon as the twelfth month rolls around, I say to myself—No more sacrifices this year; what nonsense to believe in! But then, right after the twentieth of the month, I start feeling that it's just not right, that not to sacrifice to the Kitchen God would be like committing a crime, like losing something. You, Tsui-lan, you reason with me every year, and it isn't that I don't listen to you. I . . . ah, I shut my eyes, and right away see a vision of a pale-faced, long-bearded god . . . Just think—over sixty years of that kind of life. It's no easy matter to change all of a sudden!"

"Grandma, now that you see things straight, are you going to sacrifice this year or not?" Chen asked puckishly, lifting her little face.

"This year, definitely no more sacrifices!" Mrs. Jou said firmly, knocking her pipe hard against the edge of the *kang*.

"Good! Wonderful! Wonderful!" Chen began clapping her hands.

"Monkey! Less nonsense!" Tsui-lan was afraid that the grandmother would be nettled, and tried to hold Chen back.

"Let her be happy; she deserves to be," Mrs. Jou said laughingly. "I was an old muddle-head. Just think, if it weren't for the cadres and their leadership getting the mutual-aid teams set up and the women to join in work in the fields, if it weren't for my daughter-in-law becoming progressive, do you suppose we could have reaped so much grain this autumn? This year, that old pale-faced, long-bearded god can go up to heaven on his own. I won't be there to send him off!"

"Mother, you really mean it?" asked Tsui-lan, flushed with happy excitement.

"Why shouldn't I mean what I say?" Mrs. Jou clapped her hands "I'll get the candied melon and you all eat it up!" She actually got off the *kang* and rummaged among the pots and jars atop the cupboard and brought out a paper bag which she placed on the *kang*.

"Take some! The child can get clever lips for school from eating it, grown-ups can get clever hands to write letters to the child's father, cadres can get clever minds to serve the masses!"

Everyone laughed.

Tsui-lan said, "Look at Mother! What a glib talker she is now!"

Mrs. Jou chuckled and went back to tending the fire at the grate.

After supper, the whole family carried on with the meat dumplings. Fatigued from a day's walking, I retired to the west room, intending to read a bit and then go to bed. Mrs. Jou came in to light the *kang* fire for me. She had scarcely put in a few sticks of kindling when she went out again and didn't come back. By this time, the whole village had finished supper. Along the street came children's shouts and laughter and exploding firecrackers in bursts of sound. All of a sudden my thoughts flashed back to a scene of many years ago. It was in 1943, the cruellest period in the war against Japan. A great change had come over this region and we could only carry out our operations after dark. Also on a night of the 23rd of the 12th lunar month, a band of us "night patrollers" stealthily passed through the streets of an enemy-occupied village. About every hundred paces there hung a string of red lanterns on which were written the words "Happy Land of the Emperor's Way" or "East Asia Co-Prosperity"—What hideous eye-sores! . . .

I decided to go out to watch the goings on in the street, and had just stepped out of my door, when I caught sight of Mrs. Jou standing in the dark courtyard. She had her hands clasped and was mumbling.

". . . If you really exist, Kitchen God, you'd better go back to Heaven and stay there this time, because it's no use your coming down again—not even your picture is being sold now. People don't believe in you nowadays. You don't count. . . ."

At this point, the door of the east room burst open and out jumped Chen, like a little monkey, laughing and shrieking:

"Grandma, ha ha ha ha . . . you're a scream! You'll make us die of laughter!"

"Ha ha ha ha! . . ." From behind the door Tsui-lan's laughter could also be heard.

Mrs. Jou did not get angry, nor did she laugh. She only walked slowly into the east room. Chen ran over to me, made a mischievous grimace and also went back to the east room. For a long time mother and daughter could still be heard laughing in fits and starts.

After a bit, Mrs. Jou's voice said softly, "Quit laughing, will you? If Chin hears, he'll make fun of us." But the little girl couldn't stop giggling.

I stood outside my door and looked up at the sky, where the stars were so thickly studded, so bright. I heard something fly quietly skywards. It wasn't the Kitchen God, but little Chen's crystal-clear, tinkling laughter, to tell the stars how man, by his own strength, had brought about change never before known in history. . . .

Editorial Notes

On September 23, 1953, the Second Conference of the All-China Federation of Writers and Artists was convened in Peking. This was a major event in literary and artistic circles, having an important bearing on the future development of literature and art. The First Conference was held in July 1949, in Peking, before all of China had been liberated. During the four years since then the whole mainland has been liberated, counter-revolutionaries have been suppressed, land reform has been completed, prices have been stabilised, and the Chinese people are entering upon a period of peaceful construction. As their living standards rise, our people are eagerly demanding a richer cultural life. Our output of works of literature and art can no longer meet their demands; while, because the cultural level of the masses is rising, the quality of such works also needs to be improved. In line with China's programme of large-scale construction, the task of our writers and artists today is to increase the output and improve the quality of their work. This was the situation when the Second Conference of the All-China Federation of Writers and Artists met.

Nearly six hundred delegates attended the conference, representing writers, artists, dramatists, actors and folk artists from all parts of China. The conference, which lasted for twelve days, summarised past work, criticised certain misconceptions regarding Chairman Mao's directives on literature and art, and on this basis correctly defined the future direction and aim of art and literature—socialist realism. Concrete proposals were also made for solving various problems encountered by writers and artists in their work. The original All-China Association of Literary Workers has been reorganised as the Association of Chinese Writers, and its specific tasks have been outlined. In future it will not only guide the creative work and critical writing of professional authors, but will also help to train young writers. In the past the association helped many writers in their creative work by enabling them to go to factories and villages to take part in the life and struggle there. In future the association will give more systematic help of this nature. At the same time, through its various magazines—*People's Literature*, *New Observer*, and *Stories and Songs*—it will promote and train many new writers. Another of its tasks is the revaluation of our cultural heritage and the introduction of world classics. Hence a Classical Literature Research Group has been set up in the new Association of Chinese Writers, which is bringing out a magazine devoted to the translation of the best works of world literature into Chinese.

One of the articles in this number, *New Realities and New Tasks*, was a report given at this conference on problems of creative writing.

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Lu Hsun was a great revolutionary democrat and a great fighter for the cause of communism, a genius born of the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people in modern times. An account of his revolutionary development may be found in Feng Hsueh-feng's article *Lu Hsun: His Life and Thought* in the Spring 1952 number of this magazine. *My Old Home*, in this issue, gives a masterly portrayal of villagers and village life. Here we have an unforgettable picture of the bankrupt condition of the countryside of old China and the honest simplicity of the cruelly oppressed peasantry.

Forging the Sword is based on a folk tale over a thousand years old. Through this story Lu Hsun reflected the determination and fearlessness of Chinese youth in their struggle against feudalism. The story was written when the first revolutionary civil war had just broken out in the south, and warlords in the north were massacring students and citizens. Lu Hsun called on his readers to wage a revolutionary struggle to avenge themselves on the reactionaries.

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In this number we present eleven chapters from Chou Li-po's novel *Hurricane*. This novel describes a great political movement of the Chinese people—land reform. Although the eleven chapters published here are only a part of the whole, we gain a clear picture of the complex and tortuous course of land reform in villages long under the sway of feudalism, especially before the whole of China had been liberated, while the People's Liberation Army was still contending with Chiang Kai-shek's troops who represented the reactionary feudal power. The action of this story takes place toward the end of 1946, in Sungkiang Province of Northeast China.

Like other good writers in China today, Chou Li-po does not dream up his characters and plot, nor write according to formula. He has lived with his characters, taken part in their struggle, and shared their thoughts and feelings. Because of this, he can give us a true picture of them. Our writers are convinced that to give a faithful description of life, they must first plunge into the heart of the struggle. Chou Li-po first went to the region in which his story is set in October 1946, when he joined a land reform work team to help the peasants win land.

Chou Li-po was born in 1908 in a small village in Hunan. His father was a primary school teacher, and his family was very poor. He had no chance, therefore, to receive a systematic education. In 1928 he went to Shanghai, and passed the entrance examination to the free University for Workers. But after taking part in the left-wing students' movement, he was expelled. Thereafter he worked unremittingly for the revolution. In 1932, for joining in the Shanghai workers' strike in protest to Japanese aggression, he was arrested and imprisoned for two and a half years. In 1937, after the outbreak of the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression,

he joined the Eighth Route Army led by the Chinese Communist Party. From that time until the liberation of China, he undertook cultural and political work at the front, in the enemy's rear and in the liberated areas. In addition to this novel, he helped to write the script for the film *Liberated China*, which won a Stalin Prize. *Hurricane*, published here, is also a Stalin Prize winner.

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Folk songs are one of the most popular forms of folk literature in China. In the old society very few of the working people had the chance to receive an education, and the great majority of them were illiterate; but they had their own cultural life, expressed for the most part through folk songs. In these songs they voiced the sorrows and sufferings in their life and their resentment against their oppressors. After China was liberated, the working people became the masters of the country and entered upon a new, richly creative life. The five folk songs printed in this number express the new spirit of the Chinese people.

Ho Chi-fang, the writer of the article introducing Chinese folk songs, is himself a poet. He was born in Szechuan Province in 1912. In 1935 he published a volume of poetry, *Prophecy*. Japanese imperialism was then launching an all-out attack against China. Stirred by the high tide of popular resistance to imperialism, Ho Chi-fang joined the revolution and went to Yenan, where he became a member of the Chinese Communist Party. Thereafter he did cultural work in the liberated areas. After China's liberation, he came to Peking, and is now Vice Director of the Literary Research Institute of Peking University.

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The village life depicted in the three sketches by Chin Chao-yang is obviously very different from that in Chou Li-po's *Hurricane*. Chin Chao-yang describes villages four years after liberation, and after the completion of land reform when Chinese peasants entered upon a life of peaceful construction. He has spent some time with these new peasants, hence he can draw them to the life. He is thirty-five this year. He was originally an artist but, to use his own words, "close contact with the masses and living in the thick of the struggle made me want to put into words the life I saw. So I aspired to be a writer." He has served as one of the editors of *People's Literature*.

